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October
2005

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

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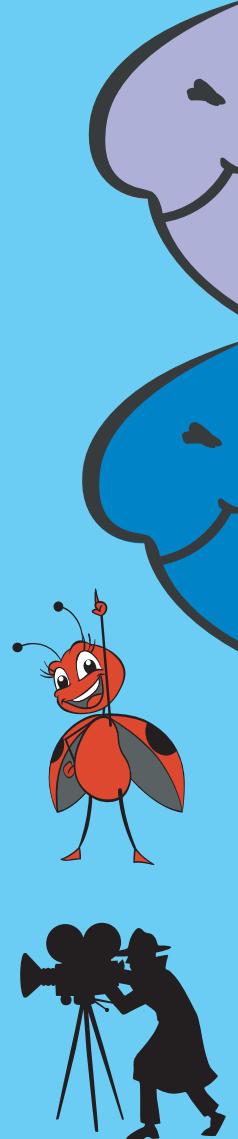
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On the Cover:

DreamWorks brings Aardman's clever *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* to theaters in October.

Cartoon Forum Cover: © Happy Life Animation AB & Studio Baestarts 2005.

Correction: Mike Girard is the supervising producer for Nickelodeon's acclaimed new series, *Catscratch*. Girard has overseen the animation for shows such as *The Simpsons*, *Duckman* and the *Rugrats Go Wild* movie. Wayne Knight, Kevin McDonald and Rob Paulsen provide the voices of the three lead cats. The show airs Fridays at 8:30 p.m. on Nickelodeon.



You think you've heard it all before, but every once in a while an entertainment executive says something in the press that really reminds you of actor John Lovitz's liar character from *Saturday Night Live*. "Yeah, that's right, the reason we're creating these animated DVDs featuring our toys is that, uh, we wanted to fill the gap in arts education in schools, yeah ... that's the ticket. That's why we're cranking these babies out every month."

Believe it or not, I actually read something like that in *Newsweek* last week (Ok, maybe the quote didn't really have the *that's the ticket* part!). Of course, we all know that arts programs in our schools are suffering because of all the awful cutbacks in education funding nationwide. Call us crazy, but, for some odd reason, we really don't think that quickly produced animated DVDs featuring anorexic, shopaholic teenage dolls are going to help solve the problem of arts education in schools.

However, we can't lose sight of the positive side of this trend. Sure, these toy-inspired DVDs may not be the best entertainment money can buy, but at least, they're keeping animators busy, right? And kids seem to actually like them. Kirra, our art director's bright and spunky 8-year-old daughter doesn't care if some of these animated adventures were created to help push dolls off the shelves at Target! If the stories are involving, if the colors are bright and the characters aren't too loud and annoying, she might actually sit through one of them without complaining.

What's telling is that no matter how many of these new flashy DVDs we try to distract her with, she'd still rather watch *Lilo & Stitch* or any of the classic Disney "princess" movies for the umpteenth time. And guess what? She loves the fact that they're traditionally animated!



Ramin Zahed
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Quote of the Month

The WB chairman Garth Ancier jokingly said that a federal court gave permission to remove the frog's feeding tube. The chairman might well be careful about pulling plugs. The frog, along with Bugs and all the WB characters, have made billions through WB merchandizing over the years. As those familiar with the cartoon know, M.J. Frog has a mysterious way of reappearing after many years, even when buried in cement!"

—Marian Jones (Mrs. Chuck Jones) in a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, in response to recent news that the WB Network was retiring M.J. Frog as its official mascot.



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The Animation Planner

October

3 San Jose, Calif.-based **Cinequest** kicks off its online Animation Discovery program today (www.cinequest.org). Also opening today is the **Leipzig International Festival of Documentary and Animated Films** in Germany (www.dokfestival-leipzig.de).

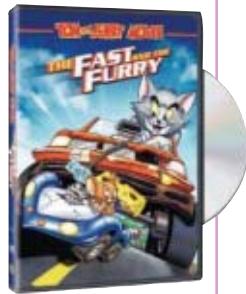
4 So many DVDs, so little time! Out in stores today are *Cartoon Network Vol. 2: Christmas Rocks*, *Cinderella: Special Platinum Edition*, *Drawn Together: Season 1* and *Happy Tree Friends: Overkill* box set.

7 Directed by Aardman's Nick Park and Steve Box, *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* will spread to theaters screens nationwide today. If you're a gaming fan, you might find yourself attending the **Indie Games Conference** in Eugene, Oregon (www.indiegames.com).

10 **Lunafest**, the national festival of women's projects begins its 100-venue run around the country (www.lunabar.com/lunafest).

11 Yup, time to spend some more toon cash for the *Bionicle 3: Web of Shadows*, *Tom and Jerry: The Fast and the Furry* and *South Park: The Complete Sixth Season* DVDs.

14 Is the world ready for a remake of John Carpenter's 1980 classic, *The Fog*? Director Rupert Wainwright and stars Selma Blair, Maggie Grace and Tom Welling certainly hope so.



15-21 Get your animated fare and take them to **MIPCOM, Jr** and **MIPCOM** markets in Cannes for a week of networking, buying and selling the next big TV series (www.mipcomjunior.com and www.mipcom.com).

18 Your wait is over! *Atomic Betty: Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* DVDs are available in a galaxy near you. Also out today, a cool new adventure from Warner Bros., titled *The Batman vs. Dracula; Ferngully: The Last Rainforest Special Edition DVD*, *Garfield Prime Time Gift Set* and *Pet Alien: Aliens Unleashed*.



24-29 Planning a South Beach getaway? How about mixing business and pleasure at the **Miami Short Film Festival** (www.miamishortfilmfestival.com)?

25 *Davey & Goliath's Snowboard Christmas* DVD sounds like a must-have this holiday season. Classic animation fans will definitely need to get their hands on *Looney Tunes: Golden Collection 3* and *Tom and Jerry: Spotlight Collection 2*. Sweet! Then, for something entirely different and more sci-fi oriented, there's *Tripping the Rift, Season 1*.

28 Antonio Banderas, reprising his role as the smooth swashbuckler from south of the border, works his magic in *The Legend of Zorro*. Catherine Zeta-Jones is also back in the sequel directed by Martin Campbell.



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail sgurman@animationmagazine.net

Books We Love

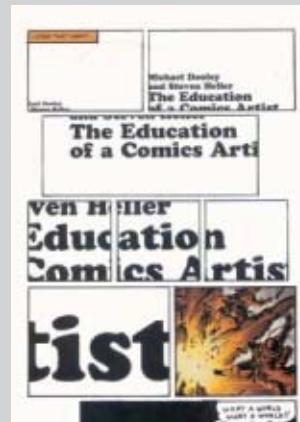
The Education of a Comics Artist
Edited by Michael Dooley and Steven Heller
(Allworth Press, \$19.95)

After spending some quality time in the treasure trove of cartooning gurus that is Comic-Con, we could hardly wait to get home and curl up with some cocoa and a copy of *The Education of a Comics Artist*. Michael Dooley and Steven Heller's anthology of essays, interviews and yes, comics, covers all the bases for those of you who want to teach, discuss, create or just plain turn the pages of the wonderful caricatured and word-balloon universe.

Brimming with advice and anecdotes from experts like Art Spiegelman (*Maus*), Bill Griffith (*Zippy*) and of course, the godfather himself, Will Eisner, *The Education of a Comics Artist* manages to inspire the reader while laying out the cold and hard logistics of making a go of it in the industry.

Each chapter dives into a different aspect of the comic-creating world, presenting a variety of voices on topics such as graphic novels, lesson plans, editorial cartoons and the creation of comics—there's not much about the biz you can't find in here. Some choice essays include Bob Mankoff's "Cartoons at the New Yorker" (did you know that celebs like Norman Mailer, Charles Grodin and Johnny Carson submitted cartoons to the cultured mag, and, were all rejected?), "In Praise of Offensive Cartoons" a la *The Realist*'s Paul Krassner and Colin Berry's "Street Smarts," which explores the relationship between cartoons and graffiti (Looney Tunes veteran Yosemite Sam was one of the first to make the graff transition). There's so much in here not to be missed, but we must admit, we're just smitten with the "Education Illustrated" section where Dan James, Nicholas Blechman, David Heatley and Rick Meyerowitz represent their career paths in cartoon form. When you look at these comic journeys side by side, the diversity of artistic style and education, even among just four comics artists, really hits home. In one of the collections many insightful interviews, *Cages* creator Dave McKean notes, "There is a direct intimacy in a comic, visual and literate, that can't be beaten, really." It's refreshing to get such a personal perspective on this medium from the artists themselves.

—Sarah Gurman



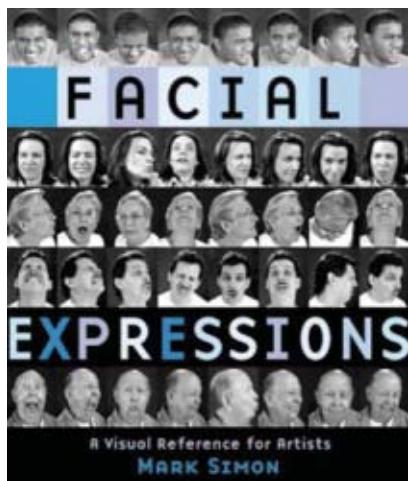
FRAME-BY-FRAME

Facial Expressions – A Visual Reference for Artists

Free Sample Phonemes

by Mark Simon

How often have you looked into a mirror to find the right visual reference for a character you are animating? Do you ever find that you just don't look enough like your character? The new visual reference book for artists, *Facial Expressions*, is here to your rescue.



Facial Expressions contains over 3,200 photos of more than 50 models ages 20-83. Each model was photographed from multiple angles holding a variety of expressions. In addition, there are reference photos of a couple kissing and of popular hats, helmets and ethnic headdresses. There are also over 150 works of art inspired from the book's photos created by artists from around the country.

In developing *Facial Expressions*, I realized that no reference guide of expressions would be complete without showing how speech affects the face. We stretch our faces with every syllable we speak.

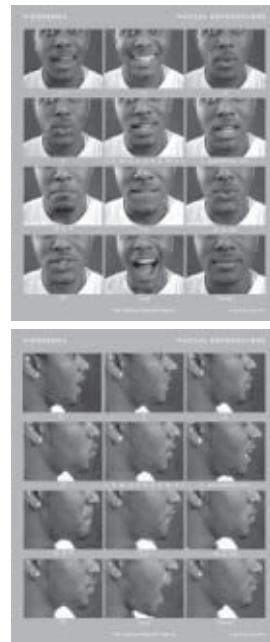
All animators—whether working in 2D and/or 3D—have the need for phoneme reference. For the artist, phonemes are speech sounds that must be translated into the mouth shapes and expressions we use when we speak.

While many animation books show illustrated styles of phonemes, this book uses photographic references of mouth positions. When you consult this gallery, instead of being influenced by another artist's rendition of speaking mouths, the drawing you make is completely your own, designed in your own creative style.

Facial Expressions contains four sets of photographic phonemes shot both straight on and in profile. I photographed a young man, an old man, a young woman and an old woman to showcase various mouth shapes. As a free gift, I'm giving you a fifth set of phonemes here.

Please note: The photos in this article may not be reproduced or used in any way other than as reference for artists. While the models understand that their faces may be replicated in all forms of art, they have not released the rights for their photos to be used outside of this text. ■

Mark Simon is an award-winning animation producer, lecturer and the author of *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation and Storyboards: Motion In Art*. Mark and his books can be found lurking around at www.MarkSimonBooks.com.



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Dream On

Do you think the fire's gone out between Mario and Princess Toadstool? Harry Potter just can't get you to that state of fantasy bliss anymore? Well the mermaids, ogres and dwarfs gallivanting through *The Dreamland Chronicles* are just itching to whisk your imagination to a vividly designed 3D land of tall tales. Digitally illustrated by Scott Christian Sava (*Spider-Man: Quality of Life*, *The Lab*), issues 1 and 2 of the 24-part series are already available, and issue 3 will sprinkle some whimsy onto comic book shelves on August 31.

Sava's own L.A.-based Blue Dream Studios and Alias publish *The Dreamland Chronicles*, serving up the adventures of Alexander, a nighttime regular in Dreamland along with Kiwi the fairy, Paddington the rock boy and Nastajia the elf princess. On

Alexander's twelfth birthday he stops dreaming for eight years, and when he finally returns to Dreamland, he's got all sorts of catching up to do. The REM-inspired universe has grown in his

absence, with dragons, giants, elves and other mythical creatures joining the cast of characters. Alex is also reunited with his friends from the early Dreamland years, including Nastajia, who adds that essential dollop of true love to this fantasy fest for all ages.



With over 200 characters and environments, Sava and the Blue Dream team have their hands full giving the 2D *The Dreamland Chronicles* a CG animation look—the first issue alone

took six months to complete. Sava describes the taxing process as, "essentially...making a movie. I have a team of artists who help design the characters, who model them, texture them, put bones in them, create facial expressions for them, do environments." Hmm...how long till

this epic leaps from comic pages onto the big screen?

Praised for his unique digital rendering style, Sava founded Blue Dream Studios in 2000. It has built itself a fine reputation in the industry, developing unique characters for video games, television, films and comics (working on projects featuring Casper the Friendly Ghost, the Predator and the Power Rangers). Rumor has it that Blue Dream and Alias are also set to release (in November) a new classically drawn children's book titled *Ed's Terrestrials*—something otherworldly to help hold us over until they release

the remaining 21 issues of *The Dreamland Chronicles*. ■

For more info, visit
www.bluedreamstudios.com

Ten Years at the Top

Last month, we got word that Nickelodeon has broken a major record: At the end of the second quarter in 2005, the cabler marked its tenth year as the number one cable network in total day ratings. This is quite an achievement, considering the dwindling numbers for TV and cable networks these days. Of course, the outfit has its colorful menagerie of animated shows such as *Rugrats*, *Blue's Clues*, *Dora the Explorer*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Fairly OddParents* and the latest addition, *Avatar*, to thank for this success.

"I think Nick has stayed true to its ideal of offering shows solely for kids," says Marjorie Cohn, the cabler's exec VP of development and original programming. "We kept our focus, did our research and continued to evolve with their interests through the years."

When talking about the changing world of children's TV, she brings up that in 1995 there were only 41 channels per household, while today there's an average of 92 channels per home. "Kids' programming hours have grown by over 200 percent," Cohn notes. "A lot of our competition has come and gone, broadcast has given up on attracting children and no other cable outfit has had the stamina to make the same kind of run!"



Pointing to the success of *Dora the Explorer*, Cohn adds that it's very important for Nick to keep feeding the appetite of an increasingly diverse family audience. However, she mentions that she doesn't believe in looking at trends. "We really like to focus on making the best shows possible. Kids are smarter than ever before, they have more entertainment options than any generation before them and we listen to what they have to say about our shows. Comedy continues to be very important to us. We want Nick to continue to be the place for kids to kick back and enjoy themselves."

One key point for Nickelodeon is trying not to repeat past successes. "Everyone wanted to create the next *SpongeBob*," she says. "But the next big hit is going to look absolutely nothing like *SpongeBob*. We have to follow our guts and produce new shows that have their own merits. The best ideas come from people who have singular visions and are passionate about what they're doing. There are no kits and guidelines for that. It has to come from inside. It's that singular voice that distinguishes the quality shows from the rest." ■



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PSP

MediEvil Never Dies

Cambridge Studios revives a ghastly Gothic favorite for Sony's PSP. by Ryan Ball

GAMES

K nights of the PlayStation 1 era tell stories of stalking the countryside of Gallowmere as Sir Daniel Fortesque, a so-called national hero resurrected from the grave to do battle with evil sorcerer Zarok and his legion of walking dead. Now, just in time for Halloween, the frightfully funny third-person adventure franchise is back with *MediEvil Resurrection*, exclusively for the Sony PSP. Like the original, this latest entry features plenty of wry British humor, an element applied with relish by Sony's U.K. developer, Cambridge Studios. We caught up with Cambridge producer Piers Jackson to get the inside scoop on what it took to reanimate this franchise for Sony's new handheld game gadget.

"With the last iteration of *MediEvil* having been five years ago, the original brief for our team was to reestablish the *MediEvil* brand in the minds of gamers," Jackson tells us. "To that end, we felt that the original story needed to be refreshed, particularly for those who hadn't played the PS1 game. This would also allow us to go back to rework and improve upon many of the original game's play mechanics and storylines while adding new story hooks and characters that could enable future *MediEvil* games to exist in a consistent universe."

Jackson and his team wanted to produce a title that could showcase the full abilities

of the PSP, which includes its built-in Wi-Fi capabilities. They designed multi-player mini-games that allow players to go skull-to-skull wherever they may be. He comments, "Once we had invested the time in creating the network infrastructure, race mode also became achievable, and we feel it makes a great addition to the game as a whole."

The PSP platform also presented a number of challenges. Jackson explains, "Firstly, while the PSP has an excellent control setup, it doesn't have all of the functionality of a PS2 control pad. Specifically, the lack of a second analog stick, which is often used in games of this genre for camera control, wasn't available. This, when combined with a reduced button set, involved us spending a large amount of time resolving the control design issues."

According to Jackson, the PSP development tools arrived late in the development cycle and were in limited supply early on. One way they worked around this problem was to test some of the early work on the PS2 engine. He also says getting one of the first development kits in the world and seeing a very early version of

the game appear on the PSP's screen was a big highlight of the project.

The actual development was done on PCs linked to cream-colored boxes that house both a UMD drive and a DVD drive. These boxes are then connected to hollow PSPs that contain the screen, buttons and speakers. The PSP-specific tools were augmented with Alias' Maya for modeling and animation.

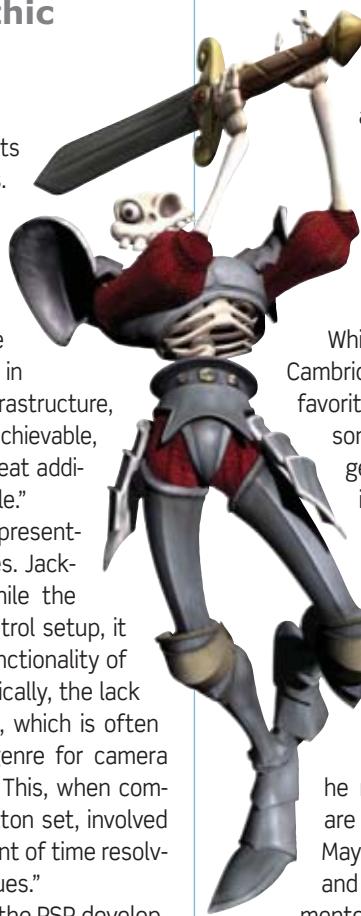
"As *MediEvil* has a style similar to stop-motion filming, all of the animations were created by hand (no mo-cap was used), with the animators generating the key poses over time and then fleshing out the detail in between," says Jackson. He adds that the most challenging character to animate was Dan himself because of the sheer number of

moves and the many additional details such as flaps in his armor. "As a general rule bipedal characters are often easier to animate than those with four legs or unusual body structures so after Dan, characters such as the wolves and Zarok in his serpent form were pretty complex."

While each member of the Cambridge team has his or her own favorite parts of the game, Jackson believes gamers will really get into the humor, which is inspired largely by British TV shows such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *Blackadder*. "Many of the funny characters and situations found in *MediEvil Resurrection* are a loving pastiche of movie-based equivalents," he remarks. "Other characters are based on real people. The Mayor is a good example of this, and several people have commented on his likeness to a certain portly British politician."

Cambridge Studios is now working to complete a PS2 game based on the hit FOX series *24* for release later this year. ■

Sony Computer Entertainment America's *MediEvil Resurrection* hits retail Sept. 13 and is rated "T" for Teen.



The image features silhouettes of characters from the Star Racers series against a dark blue night sky. In the foreground, a large, stylized title 'OBON' is displayed in a bold, blocky font. Below it, the words 'STAR · RACERS' are written in a smaller, outlined font. The background shows a large planet on the right, a smaller one on the left, and several characters in flight or racing, including a small alien-like creature and a human-like figure.

OBON

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The Horror, the Horror!

Game makers dish out tricks and treats for Halloween.

by Ryan Ball

Le'ts face it, getting dressed up like a moron and going door to door to beg for miniature candy bars is not as fun as it used to be! Plus, smashing pumpkins seems lame compared to vaporizing demons, vampires and zombies. So, perhaps, it's best to keep the blood-spattered hockey mask and matching overalls in the closet this year and instead gather some friends around the old game console for some spooky fun that won't make your butt expand like so much candy corn will.

When you catch sight of a ghoul shambling across your lawn on Oct. 31, you can't just level your sawed-off, double-barrel shotgun and blast it to pieces without its parents pressing charges. That's an urge better satisfied by THQ's *Evil Dead: Regeneration*, a title that encourages you to "kill anything dead that moves, even your partner." Developed by Cranky Pants Games, this just may be the game that rabid fans of director Sam Raimi's bloody horror flick trilogy have been waiting for.

Regeneration for PlayStation 2, Xbox and PC picks up where the first film left off. Ash has just killed all of his college pals in a cabin in the woods and has a lot of explaining to do. Charged and convicted, he finds himself committed to an insane asylum where a mad doctor uses the Necronomicon to conduct evil experiments. In his quest to rid the world of a new breed of walking dead, Ash teams up with a diminutive, wise-cracking half human/half Deadite named Sam, voiced by actor Ted Raimi (director Sam's brother!). Cranky Pants general manager David Bollesen tells us Sam Raimi likes the character so much that he has acquired the rights for possible use in an upcoming production. Bollesen also says *Regeneration* features around 40 minutes of Raimi-style cinematics. Genre

icon Bruce Campbell even comes back to reprise his star-making role for the game. Groooooovy!

It wouldn't be Halloween without a trip to Halloweentown. Now, in addition to breaking out your copy of Tim Burton's stop-motion holiday classic, you can play the game as well. Buena Vista Games finally releases Capcom's long-awaited *The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge* for PlayStation 2 and Xbox. The adventure title casts players in the role of Jack Skellington, the only one who can stop the devious Oogie Boogie from kidnapping all the leaders of the holidays and establishing himself as king. Armed with a new weapon called the Soul Robber, our hero can transform into Santa Jack or Pumpkin Jack to handle certain situations. Look for a feature on the making of the game in the next issue.

Like Sony's *MediEvil: Resurrection* (see feature in this issue), Konami's *Death Jr.* brings Tim Burton-esque Halloween fun to PSP. When the son of the Grim Reaper accidentally releases evil necromancer Moloch and his hoards of demons, all hell breaks loose and it's up to Death Jr. to set things right with his trusty scythe and an arsenal of firearms. Developed by Backbone Ent. and produced by former Atari guru Kirby Fong (*Battlegrounds*, *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee*), *Death Jr.* offers some fun cut scenes and throws lots of creepy creatures at you as you fight to save friends Pandora, Stigmårtha, Smith & Weston, Dead Guppy and The Seep. And if you like the game, you can buy the action figures at Hot Topic.

Gore hounds can also go a few rounds with everyone's favorite blade-wielding, female vampire/human halfling in Majesco's *BloodRayne 2*. The Mature-rated action game from developer Terminal Reality debuted on PlayStation 2 and Xbox



earlier this year, but recently made its way to PC and is soon coming to PSP. On any platform, this one is sure to deliver the thrills and chills horror fans crave. Also check out Midway's *The Suffering: The Ties That Bind* for Xbox, PS2 and PC, and Groove Games' release of *George A Romero's Land of the Dead: Road to Fiddler's Green* for Xbox and PC. But if things get a bit too intense while playing any of these titles, just keep telling yourself it's only a game ... Boo! ■

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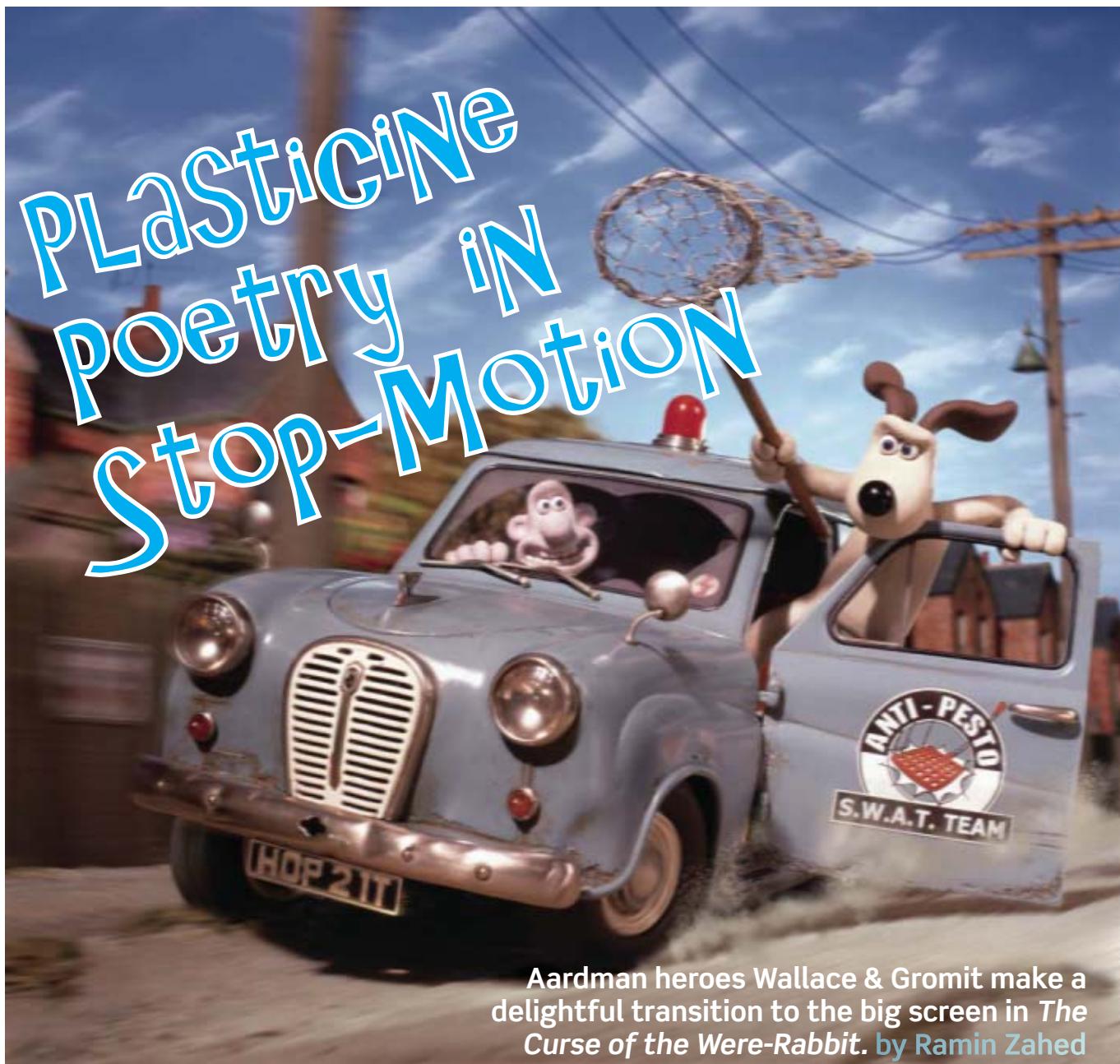
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Aardman heroes Wallace & Gromit make a delightful transition to the big screen in *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*. by Ramin Zahed

After a summer of dreadful feature adaptations of small-screen properties such as *Bewitched* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*, it's up to two Bristol-based plasticine characters to show Hollywood how to make a cinematic splash worth remembering. It's not a big surprise, really. We've come to expect sheer genius from the animators at Aardman Animation since they first came on the scene in 1987 with that phenomenal music video for Peter Gabriel's *Sledgehammer*, followed by *Creature Comforts* in 1989, the Oscar-winning short about those charming animals in captivity.

That very first same year, Nick Park delivered his first *Wallace & Gromit* short, *A Grand Day Out*, which introduced the world to that very likable (and very English) inventor Wallace and his brilliant canine companion Gromit. That well-crafted piece received an Oscar nomination for best animated short in 1990. Audiences were hungry for more *Wallace & Gromit* adventures, so Park and his animators at Aardman created two more chapters, *The Wrong Trousers* in 1993 and *A Close Shave* in

1995. Park's exquisite storytelling techniques, humor and stop-motion art brought him two Oscars.

It was only a matter of months before Hollywood called, and Park and co-director Peter Lord took the helm of the \$42 million DreamWorks feature, *Chicken Run*. The fowl prison escape spoof, set in a sinister chicken farm in the 1950s, featured the voices of Mel Gibson and Miranda Richardson and took in over \$230 million worldwide. It only seemed





Veggie Tale: In *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, Aardman's favorite canine pal has high hopes for his well-cared-for squash. The movie welcomes two new characters, Victor Quartermaine (voiced by British actor Ralph Fiennes) and Lady Tottington, portrayed by Helena Bonham Carter (*Tim Burton's Corpse Bride*) in her second high-profile stop-motion starring role of the season.



natural for Park to tackle *Wallace & Gromit*'s first theatrical caper.

"Because of the success of shorts, it was very nerve-wracking," says Park. "We didn't want our first feature to be a *Wallace & Gromit* adventure, so we tried out the new chicken characters first. Then about five years ago, we finally got an idea that was right for a full W&G feature."

Park's co-director on the feature is Steve Box, another Aardman colleague who animated the evil penguin Feather McGraw in *The Wrong Trousers* and also had great success with his own stop-motion short, *Stage Fright*. He says the idea for the feature occurred to them on a typi-

cal day in a pub. "We love to talk about things that we loved as kids, the movies we grew up with, things like the cartoons and Ealing comedies," he recalls.

Of course, what would be a better idea for the devoted dog and his mild-mannered master than to get involved in a story dealing with a giant vegetable growing contest, eccentric British aristocrats living in huge manors and a huge rabbit with a mysterious supernatural affliction. As is customary in all of the W&G adventures, the filmmakers pay homage to some of their favorite cinematic masterpieces. "We are always thinking about a catalog of movies



that we've admired in our lives," says Park. "We looked at all the Universal horror movies—*The Mummy*, *Frankenstein*, all the werewolf movies, the Hammer horror titles. Then, because part of the movie was set against this stately, aristocratic home, we went over *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, as well as the *Brideshead Revisited* TV series. We even looked at *Barry Lyndon* and *The Go-Between*. Any particular sequence can spark the memory of another movie and that always resonates with us."

Box agrees, "I think we watched every werewolf movie we could find. We are always talking about movies, and as much as we want our world to be an original one, classic films often end up being our reference point."

Of course, Box and Park did a lot

FEATURE

Storyboard drawing by David Vinnicombe



more than watch great classics to get their new masterpiece ready. They split the directing duties of the 94-minute feature between them and led a team of 30 animators. "We worked on 20 to 30 sets," says Park. "On a very good day, each animator gets to finish two or three seconds. That means by the end of the week, we get a maximum of two minutes!"

Box points out, "We don't have the

luxury of overshooting and creating the film in the editing room. What makes things incredibly difficult is that many sequences are shot out of order. Editing them as if the film was shot in two or three cameras is always a headache."

When asked to pick their most challenging sequences in the film, Park selects two of the chase sequences. "They needed so many shots, from so many different angles at terrific speeds. Those scenes took a lot of testing. But sometimes it's just about delivering the right expressions with the eyebrows, two characters looking at each other in a certain way or getting the comedy to work."

For Box, a six-minute sequence involving a giant rabbit-sucking machine called the Bun-Vac (Bunny Vacuum) was the hairiest part of the job. "It was a very complex sequence because it followed the action in two different areas; two characters were having a conversation on one side of the house (Lady Tottington and Victor Quartermaine, voiced by Helena Bonham Carter and Ralph Fiennes), while Wallace and Gromit were setting up the Vac in another side. We had to coordinate all the eye lines and geography and then all the bunnies in the Bun Vac."

Helping the stop-motion team with this sequence was the Moving Picture Company, which provided some digital relief. "We have used CG technology before to create flames or fog," says Park. "The sequence involving the bunnies in the Vac would be extremely difficult to do solely in stop-motion. We were very careful, though, not to

continued on page 18

A Few Important Facts About Our Heroes



One of Wallace's most clever inventions is the lightweight, portable bus stop, although using it guarantees that three buses will come along at once.



After a hard day, Gromit likes to play music to relax. He often plays "Yelp" by the Beatles.



Gromit's favorite movie is Indiana Bones, which he watches at least once a week.



The service hatch not only brings Wallace his grub, but it's also a handy mini-elevator for Gromit, who uses it to keep up his reputation of being everywhere at one time.



Wallace keeps his favorite books, *East of Edam* and *Grated Expectations*, on his bedside table.



The Bunvac 6000—a giant vacuum cleaner with a huge suction power can clear a lawn clean of rabbits in seconds. It is capable of 125 rpm—that's rabbits per minute!



The Were-rabbit's latin name is *Carrotus apetus giganticus*.

Experts estimate that a Were-rabbit is fluffier than 13,042 sweet kittens put together, but a Were-rabbit is a lot scarier.

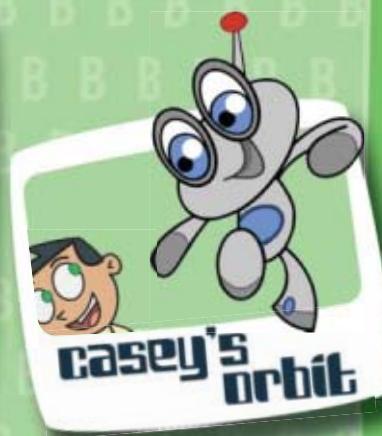


Excerpted from *Wallace & Gromit—Curse of the Were-Rabbit: The Essential Guide*. Written by Glenn Dakin (DK Publishing, \$12.99) www.dk.com.



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Original concept design by Nick Park and Steve Box



Technique, in a way, isn't really important. We just happen to love stop-motion and believe that traditional clay animation brings a certain charm to the story, and that's why people have responded so well to the traditional Aardman projects."

The universal appeal of Wallace (who is always voiced by the great British actor Peter Sallis), Gromit (he is mute) and their cozy nostalgic English village is something that continues to amaze Park. "We simply put what we found funny and appealing in our shorts, and we did the same for the movie," says the animator. "We never had a particular age group in mind. We found out that what we found appealing seemed to work for others as well!"

The classical teaming of a likable man and his devoted dog is what Box believes is the magical formula. "Everyone responds to the classic double act of a man and his dog," he says. "We realize that Gromit is much smarter than Wallace. It's a situation that is eternally humorous. Gromit is also silent, and that appeals to people in any language. It offers viewers with a great way to experience the world through Gromit's eyes."

As brilliant and complex as many of the hand-crafted animation sequences are, sometimes it's the gentler, more humane moments that become the pride and joy of the creators. "Certain sequences work well in different ways," admits Park. "Honestly, though, I do love the moment in the film where Gromit puts an electric blanket on his prize vegetable. It's not complicated, but there's a lot of space and room in the scene, and the whole scene is very gentle."

Since the movie centers on the very English pastime of tending vegetable gardens, you might assume that Park and Box also share the same passion. As it turns out, Park is the only one with the green thumb. As Box admits: "Nick is more of a vegetable grower," he says. "The last time I tried to grow a pumpkin, I think it got to be the size of a tennis ball!" ■

Wallace & Gromit—The Curse of the Were-Rabbit
opens in theaters on Oct. 7.

FEATURE



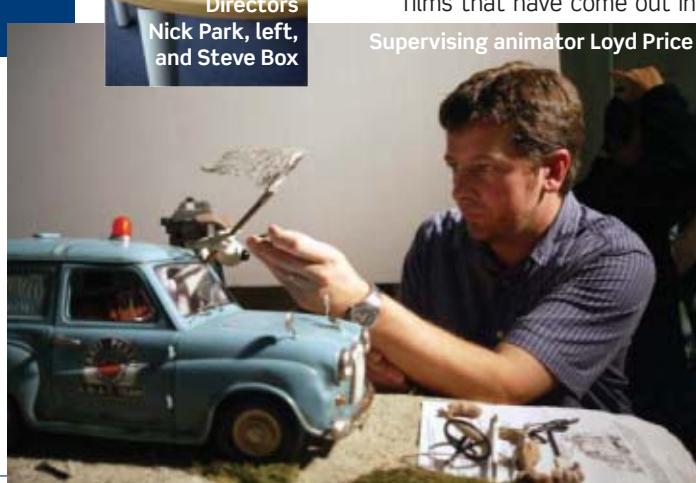
Directors
Nick Park, left,
and Steve Box

ect with DreamWorks is *Flushed Away*, a fully CG-animated project about an uptown rat who finds himself lost in the subterranean, working-class world of the London sewage system. Featuring a top notch voice cast including Hugh Jackman, Kate Winslet, Ian McKellen, Bill Nighy and Andy Serkis, the film is slated for a holiday 2006 release.

Park says he's a big fan of many of the CG films that have come out in the past few years.

Supervising animator Loyd Price

"CG animation can look fantastic in the right hands. Whether you use CG or stop-frame, you are subject to the same burden. You have to come up with great ideas, and the ideas have to suit the medium and be entertaining."





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The Fantasists: Writer Neil Gaiman (above) and director/illustrator Dave McKean (seated) joined forces to map out the outlandish landscapes of *MirrorMask*.

Beyond the Looking Glass

Fantasy writer Neil Gaiman joins forces with director and digital wizard Dave McKean to create the unique and otherworldly universe of *MirrorMask*. by Ramin Zahed

A beautiful and bored young girl finds herself in a surreal universe inhabited by strange creatures in *MirrorMask*, a new feature produced by The Jim Henson Company. If that plotline reminds you of Henson's *Labyrinth*, the 1986 cult favorite which starred then 16-year-old Jennifer Connelly, it's no coincidence. Exec producer Lisa Henson was actually thinking about that film when she pitched the story to fantasy writer Neil Gaiman four years ago.

"I got a phone call from Lisa saying that Sony was interested in collaborating with the Hensons on a movie that echoed both *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*," says Gaiman in a phone conversation during a recent book tour. "The biggest problem was that *Labyrinth* was made for 40 million dollars, while Sony wanted us to do the film for four million!"

That's when Gaiman, who has penned fantasy novels such as *American Gods*, *Neverwhere* and *Coraline* and has also written the screenplay for the upcoming *Beowulf* feature (to be directed by

Robert Zemeckis), thought about his collaborator, artist, illustrator and director Dave McKean (*The Sandman*). "Dave had done these amazing short films in his mother's home in Bath, and I knew he could deliver the ethereal look of the film," says Gaiman. "CGI can become incredibly expensive when you try to make something real, but when you go for something that is close to

art, it becomes cheaper. The sky could become metallic one day, the street could become 3D giant fleas, anything is possible in this world."

McKean, who also contributed designs for the second and third *Harry Potter* movies, says because of the *MirrorMask*'s restricted budget, he couldn't really afford to take the film's numerous visual effects jobs to other shops. "So we hired 15 animators right out of art school [most from Bournemouth University in England]," he says. "It was the only way to do it because they hadn't worked in the industry before and hadn't picked up any bad habits. They were eager to prove themselves."

After shooting on location in London and Brighton for two weeks, followed



by four weeks in a blue screen studio, McKean and his team had less than a year and half to do all the animation and post work. Using Alias Maya and After Effects, McKean and his hard-working team did all the designing, texture mapping and rendering. "Usually if you're a visual effects professional, you get to work on a small sequence in a big movie. However, as a CG modeler, you prefer to do a big chunk of the film instead of doing one little job."

Gaiman recalls one specific conversation with McKean that completely summarizes the director's approach. "We were writing the script at one point, and we were about to set up a scene in a school, and Dave tells me, 'Wait a second, if we set the scene in a school, we will need to shoot in a school; we'll need rooms, and kids and teachers and chaperones. That would be expensive. But we could crumble the world into a flower, and I could do that for nothing!'"

Another anecdote centers on McKean's first rough cut of the film, which was mostly shot in blue screen. When

he was asked how many special effects were required in the film, Gaiman recalls, "He looked at them with wisdom in his eyes and said, 'There will only be one, but it will be 80 minutes long' "

Working with the movie's accomplished cast—which includes Stephanie Leonidas, Gina McKee and Jason Barry—was a new experience for McKean. "As a painter and illustrator, I'm used to working on projects on my own, so having to deal with people everyday was a new thing for me. Fortunately,

them the drawings as they needed to react against a blue screen in a studio in London."

After *MirrorMask*, McKean moves his magical box of digital treats to another fantasy realm, this one created by author Anne Rice. He is producing short CG-driven films, which will be incorporated in the upcoming *Lestat* musical, written by Elton John and Bernie Taupin. "The films will be used while the vampires receive all the memories of their victims as they suck their blood."

Does McKean believe that we're in the midst of a new era of CG entertainment? "We're beginning to see a new wave of people who are using digital effects to tell all kinds of stories, not just fantasies," he muses. "We can now create even more unusual and stranger films, using images that we used to associate with more expensive, bigger films. The new digital possibilities are much more liberating, and they allow artists to develop more unusual and expressive films than we've ever seen in the past." ■

The Jim Henson Company, Destination and Samuel Goldwyn Films release *MirrorMask* in selected theaters in the U.S. on Sept. 30.

I had some really amazing actors to work with."

After the initial writing sessions with Gaiman, McKean storyboarded every shot before he started shooting. "I needed the storyboards both for me and the actors because I could show

Otherworldly: McKean hired a small team of recent grads from Bournemouth University to help him create the elaborate vfx of his feature film, *MirrorMask*.

FEATURE





Beyond the Nuts and Bolts

The *Robots* DVD is ready to roll.

Fox Home Video will release last spring's visually stunning CG-animated Robots on September 27, so we thought it was a good time to catch up with the film's talented co-director Chris Wedge to get his take on the DVD's extras and other bells and whistles.

First up, can you tell us a little about the new animated short, *Aunt Fanny's Tour of Booty* that's included in the release:

Wedge: To be honest, it's more of an added bonus material than a stand-alone short. It's a really clever way some of the guys came up with to include original deleted material from the project. A lot of the stuff takes place in the train station, and there were a lot of gags that we didn't include in the final version. There are actually more than four minutes worth of deleted scenes. If you want to see all the deleted scenes, then you'll have to wait for the director's cut!



Chris Wedge

With over \$128.1 million in ticket sales, the film is currently the number 10 grossing movie of 2005. How do you feel about the way the film performed at the box office?

Wedge: It's hard to look at the financial success of the movie as the sole measure of its success. Somehow, you always think you could have done better. There were moments in *Robots* that we wanted to spend more time with, but overall, I believe we accomplished what we set out to do eight years ago!

Do you think the film would have performed better had it been released in the summer like *Madagascar* or during the holiday season like *The*

Polar Express?

Wedge: Yes, it would have made more money in the summer or the holidays, but March was a good window for us. Blue Sky's first feature, *Ice Age* was released the same time, and it did really well, too.

And what's next for Chris Wedge and Blue Sky Studios?

Wedge: I'm exec producing *Ice Age 2: The Meltdown* [a making of featurette and trailer are included on the *Robots* DVD], Carlos Saldanha is directing the feature (penned by Jon Vitti of *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill* fame) for a 2006 release. It centers on the possibility of the *Ice Age* coming to a close, and Manny (voiced by Ray Romano) is beginning to wonder if he's the only mammoth left on Earth. There's also a love story. It was a lot of fun to go back and revisit the original film's characters. And of course, Scrat has a huge presence! [The voice cast list also includes Denis Leary, John Leguizamo, Queen Latifah and Drea de Matteo of *The Sopranos*.]

Have new advancements made in technology since the original film's release (2002) made any impact on the look of the sequel?

Wedge: Because *Ice Age* was stylized to a good degree, and it was our first movie, it had a very distinctive style, and we're sticking to that same look. However, technology has given us the ability to deliver more complex visuals with more ease. For example, we have much more advanced technology for depiction of water and that helped us a lot in the sequel. ■

Robots is available in both full-screen and widescreen DVD on VHS and on UMD (Fox's first day-and-date release for the Sony PSP). All formats will be priced for \$29.98.

Junior

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Junior



anime excursions

We're happy to announce that with this issue *Animation Magazine* is launching a monthly column by anime expert Charles Solomon. With so many new titles available to global audiences each month, we certainly welcome Charles' expert advice on which packages to view and which to ignore in DVD stores. If you have any suggestions for Charles, please e-mail him at edit@animationmagazine.net.



Illustration by Dan Hoffstedt

by Charles Solomon

Azumanga Daioh: Class Album (ADV Films, 5 discs, \$48.99)



Azumanga Daioh offers a new style of entertainment for girls that might be dubbed *anime verité*. The 26-episode series follows eight girls through three years of high school in Tokyo. The characters lead everyday lives of classes, exams, festivals, field trips and athletic events. At times *Azumanga Daioh* even manages to make *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* look racy by comparison.

In many *shojo* (girls') series, groups of young women battle giant robots, monsters, demons and other dire threats. Some cope with romantic entanglements; others pursue careers as pop singers or models. The *Azumanga Daioh* characters don't go into combat, lose their clothes or seek fame and glamour. Ten-year-old prodigy Chiyo confesses she would like to be as tall as the athletic Sakaki; Sakaki would like to be as cute as Chiyo. That's the extent of the revelations.

Much of the comedy comes from the broadly caricatured teachers. Hard-drinking English instructor Yukari resents the popularity of the more sensible coach Nyamo, even though they're old friends and former classmates. Mr. Kimura teaches because he enjoys ogling the students. The girls' reassuring ordinariness is a major source of the show's appeal: *Azumanga Daioh* plays like a cross between *Seinfeld* and a girl's novel of the "Trixie Beldin" era.

Pom Poko (Buena Vista, 2 discs, \$29.99)

Isao Takahata's (*Grave of the Fireflies*)'s offbeat ecological fable *Pom Poko* raised eyebrows when it became the first animated feature to be submitted for the Oscar for Foreign Film in 1994.



In Japanese folklore, raccoons (*tanuki*) are tricksters and shape-shifters, but the raccoons who live in the Tama Hills usually don't indulge in pranks or transformations. The region's small farms attract plenty of frogs and other edibles: *Pom Poko* represents the sound a raccoon's full tummy makes when it's patted.

But humans are turning the Tama Hills into a gigantic suburb and ending the idyll. The raccoons learn to transform into objects and people. When sabotaging building sites fails to frighten away the construction crews, the raccoons stage elaborate tableaux that evoke traditional ghost stories. To the raccoons' frustration, people assume the nightmare parade is a publicity stunt for a local theme park. Although often broadly funny, *Pom Poko* rambles, and the characters remain too underdeveloped to sustain the audience's interest for two hours.

It should be pointed out that male raccoons have prominent testicles, and Japanese artists don't shy away from depicting them. The males in *Pom Poko* have, well, balls, that bounce along when the characters run. In the final, desperate battle, they swell their scrotums to enormous size and use them as weapons. American viewers aren't

used to this kind of anatomical frankness, and *Pom Poko* may strike them as the damnedest animated feature they've ever seen.

Magical Shopping Arcade Abenobashi: Complete Collection (ADV Films: 4 discs, \$49.98)



Magical Shopping Arcade Abenobashi offers the kind of unabashed cartoon fun that a lot of American animation lacks. Twelve-year-olds Sashi and Arumi grew up together near a low-rent Osaka shopping center. Closing that mall disturbs the four Chinese directional gods, who send Sashi and Arumi ricocheting through a succession of parallel universes. The reluctant heroes try to get back home, despite the "assistance" of their relatives and friends, who appear as a sort of inter-dimensional repertory company.

The alternate universes spoof everything from the anime classics *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Fist of the North Star* to Hollywood's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Star Wars*. In episode #6, Sashi and Arumi find themselves in a Roaring Twenties gangland where snails have been banned, and diners come to speakeasies for meals of illegal escargots. The narrator notes that many of the heroes' problems are the result of their reliance on the magic of "goblins who lose to ordinary grade school kids."

To approximate the rough Osaka dialect of the original Japanese dialogue, Jessica Boone (Arumi) and Luci Christian (Sashi) affect Texas accents—which takes getting used to. But the fast-paced misadventures are risqué, outrageous and often hilarious. ■

Three to Treasure

In this uncertain world of fall TV premieres, it's best to arm yourself with some classic DVDs just to keep things in perspective. **by Sarah Gurman**

Looney Tunes: Golden Collection, Vol. 3 (Warner Bros.)

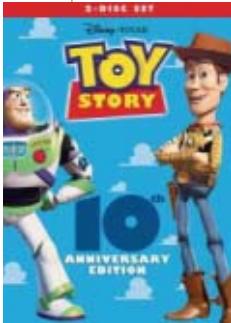
Fans are calling this the best Looney Tunes Golden Collection yet, and that's saying something because volumes one and two are no slouches. These four discs are heaped with 60 more piping hot classics, and some of the slaphappy gems have never been available before on home video. Volume three serves up essentials like *Robin Hood Daffy*

(we challenge you to find a more enter-

taining bit of illusory duck grandeur), the masterpiece in Sylvester neurosis *Claws for Alarm*, Porky Pig's 1935 debut toon *I Haven't Got a Hat* and the final installment in the Chuck Jones Elmer/Daffy/Bugs hunting trilogy *Duck! Rabbit! Duck!*. Experts such as Michael Barrier, Greg Ford and Paul Dini, to name a few, provide all-star commentary on the significance of the Termite Terrace shorts, and the bonus features, which include a tribute to director Frank Tashlin, the first Looney Tune ever, *Sinking in the Bathtub*, and a Pepe Le Pew documentary, make this DVD set a home entertainment force to be reckoned with—just try tearing yourself away. This delicious blend of cartoon comedy will be available on October 25 for \$64.92. Go on, scavenge the couch cushions for loose change. This is one of those purchases you don't have to justify.

Toy Story: 10th Anniversary Edition (Buena Vista)

Howdy Hay! It's time to roll out the red carpet for Woody and Buzz, and celebrate *Toy Story*'s tenth anniversary DVD style. John Lasseter's playful vision of the secret lives of toys earned



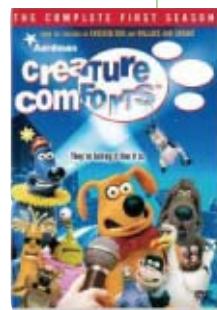
him a special achievement Oscar in 1996 for the development and inspired application of techniques that made the first feature-length computer-animated film possible. For \$29.99 you can revisit the spectacular toy de force that pitted the old faithful Cowboy Woody (voiced by Tom Hanks) against Tim Allen's spanking new Buzz Lightyear, with the two becoming fast friends while trapped in Sid the sadistic neighbor kid's clutches. The anniversary edition is encoded with the highest DVD bit-rate ever used for a Disney/Pixar film and Academy Award winner Gary Rydstrom remastered the audio so you can enjoy Randy Newman's "You've Got a Friend In Me" in all of its glory. (Did we mention the two disc set features an all-new music video

with Lyle Lovett and Newman tag-teaming on the classic ditty?) Among the other primo extras: a look at the pop culture and animation legacy of *Toy Story* with voice actor interviews, a new "The Making Of Toy Story" featurette and a sneak peek at Pixar's big 2006 package, *Cars*. And remember, although the folks

at Pixar aren't actually tackling it, Disney's *Toy Story 3* is just around the corner in '08.

Creature Comforts: Complete First Season (Sony)

Nick Park, he marches to the beat of his own animation drum and that's why we filled our Netflix queue with every existing stop-motion brainchild of his that we could dig up, biding our time until *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* hops into theatres. And just when we thought we couldn't take all of this waiting any more, we got word of the September 27 *Creature Comforts: Complete First Season* DVD release, and the office breathed a collective sigh of relief. The first season's 13 nine-minute episodes deliver a hilarious Aardman jaunt into the psyche of animals who have a knack for dry British humor. Whether it's a circus elephant discussing performance anxiety, a pigeon considering the morality of eating chicken or a pig with sun stroke, the stars of *Creature Comforts* (which aired last year on the BBC) will definitely make you wonder what your Boston Terrier is really thinking when she looks at you and cocks her head to the side. And the DVD has a collection of fun extras to boot, including the original 1990 Oscar winning short that started it all and the "Bringing Creature Comforts to Life" featurette. Think of this as an Aardman crash course in animal psychology for only \$19.94. ■



Hot DVD Titles

Animation

1. *The Simpsons: Complete Sixth Season* (Fox)
2. *The Muppet Show: First Season* (Disney)
3. *Cinderella: Platinum Edition* (Disney)
4. *Fraggle Rock: First Season* (Disney)
5. *Disney's Little Einsteins: Our Big Huge Adventure* (Disney)

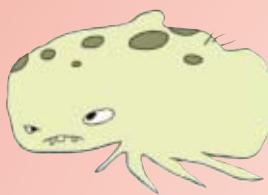


VFX

1. *Sin City* (Dimension)
2. *Lost: Complete First Season* (Disney)
3. *Star Wars: Episode 3-Revenge of the Sith* (Fox)
4. *Batman Begins* (Warner Bros.)
5. *Stargate SG-1: Season 8* (MGM)



Source: amazon.com, 8/24/05, includes online pre-release orders



Creatures of the Deep South

Inbred cephalopods raise hell in Adult Swim's latest addition, *Squidbillies*.
by Ryan Ball

Imagine going to one of the big four networks to pitch a show about a family of redneck squids living in the mountains of rural Georgia and you'll understand why we love Cartoon Network's *Adult Swim* so much. *Squidbillies* is exactly the kind of left-field concept that fans of the late-night animation block find so irresistible. If you can hang with a trio of fast-food products sharing a rental house in New Jersey (*Aqua Teen Hunger Force*), then it's not such a big stretch to imagine the Hatfields or McCoys as a bunch of tentacled sea creatures stranded by forces of nature that shaped the landscape millions of years ago.

Squidbillies is the brainchild of *Aqua*



Teen Hunger Force co-creator Dave Willis and *The Brak Show* co-creator Jim Fortier. "I think it was close to two years ago when someone was talking down the hall—I guess it was (Brak voicer) Andy Merrill and (*Squidbillies* exec producer) Mike Lazzo—and mentioned the name *Squidbillies*, but it was really nothing more than a title for about a year," says Willis. He recalls how the whole department at Williams Street Studios in Atlanta, Georgia, tried for a year to develop a show around the title before he paired up with Fortier to boil the overflow of ideas down to a workable concept.

Willis and Fortier met in high school in Conyers, Georgia. An-

other hometown friend, an airline pilot by trade, voices one of the main characters. They even got some high school friends to perform the *Squidbillies* soundtrack. Merle Haggard wanted an exorbitant amount of money to record the theme song, so they're hoping to get country/rock artist Steve Earle on board instead.

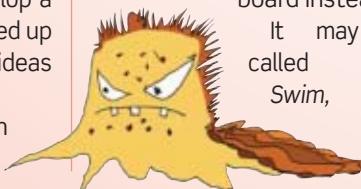
It may be called *Adult Swim*, but



Dave Willis



Jim Fortier





looking at some of these programs, it seems the grownups have all left the kids alone to do whatever they want. "They haven't been babysitting us too hard," says Fortier. "That's

one of the great things about working over here. Generally, they'll stop us when they hate something, but otherwise they let us present things to them, and they have faith in us to realize it."

The *Squidbillies* creators have been around since the early days of Adult Swim,

when it was assumed that few people were watching and they had the freedom to go wild. Now the block is a bona fide late-night competitor, pulling strong numbers in that 18-34 male demographic that advertisers like so much. "It hasn't changed anything," Willis asserts. "It seems like some people get a lot more money to make shows, though. Look at *The Boondocks*; that's like a big, ol' honking Korean-animated show probably, but we're still doing things the way we've always been doing them—making them with computers."

Squidbillies is drawn and animated in Flash, then composited with Ben Prisk's background paintings in Adobe After Effects. "I would call it rough," Fortier says

of the animation style, "but I don't think it's as low-tech as on the Internet, where they cheat frames and you can see stretching going on. We try not to do that. We're doing cel-style animation but using Flash, so we're not cheating as much as maybe we should be."

"It's a step forward for us in terms of a little bit more animation," Willis adds. "Definitely not high-quality stuff like Korean animation, but it's actually a little more advanced style of working than, say *Aqua Teen*."

Willis points out the Southern folk art influence on the show's design, noting how it adds to the low-fi feel of the production. However, he says that doesn't let them get away with cutting too many corners and making wonky animation part of the joke. "The computers and the software are getting so good now that we can actually do so much more. When we were beginning, we had to make it funny because we knew the drawings wouldn't move. Now, we have a lot more at our disposal, and we got caught up in trying to make it an actual animated show."

Fortier and Willis admit that they don't know how many tentacles squids have (Their characters actually look more like octopi.), but their team of three to four animators was able to create two tricky, multi-limbed walk cycles that they can use over and over. Fortier comments, "The good thing about Flash is that you can have a guy walking along with the same old walk cycle, and if you need one of the tentacles to pick up an axe and chop somebody, it's pretty easily done."

Willis is also working on an *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* movie with co-creator Matt Maiellaro, whose new series, *12oz Mouse*, also debuts on Adult Swim this fall. They hope to release the *Aqua Teen* feature in theaters early next year. There's no major distribution deal yet, but Willis says they're trying to get the attention of Paramount Pictures. "They need to call us." ■

Grab a beer, put your arm around your best gal/sister and enjoy *Squidbillies* when it premieres on Cartoon Network on Oct. 16 at midnight.

A Euro Toon Powerhouse

Andras Erkel and Peter Gustafsson join forces to launch several new animated projects based on popular children's books.

TELEVISION

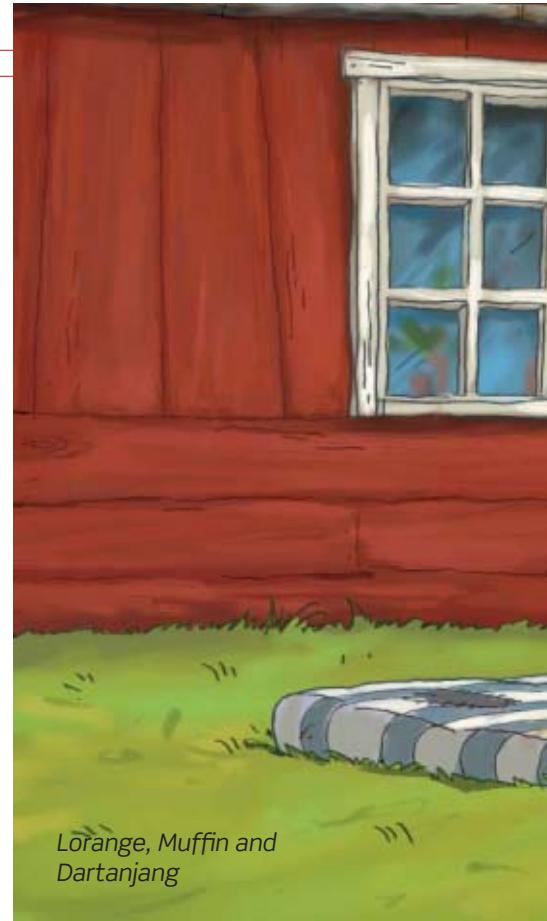
Next time someone complains about being an independent animation producer, you can tell them the upbeat story of Hungary's former Varga Studio founder and CEO, Andras Erkel, and Sweden's Happy Life founder and managing director, Peter Gustafsson. After facing some frustration with the corporate side in their former jobs, the two visionary producers joined forces last year to produce new projects that take full advantage of the new tax breaks in Hungary and other production incentives and funds in Europe.

"When I left Varga a year and a half ago to work as the chief secretary of the Hungarian Producers Association, I began to promote the new tax system for films produced in Hungary worldwide," says Erkel, who co-produced *Mr Bean: The Animated Series* a few years back. "Then utilizing my knowledge of the new film law in Hungary, I started to work as an independent producer, first as an executive producer of live-action films. Later, I brought together a new team of animators, many of which I had worked with at Varga, and launched a new venture at Studio Baestarts in Budapest."

As luck would have it, Peter Gustafsson, who had worked with Erkel during his years at Happy Life, had a project that needed financing and a studio to produce. "My working relationship with Andras goes back to 1997," recalls Gustafsson. "We had worked on animated series such as *Lisa and Meg and Mog* with Varga. When I founded Happy Life, I wanted to develop original ideas for television. We produced several successful animated series such as *Three Friends*, *Da Mob* and *Creepschool*, but it had become increasingly difficult to finance original series

without heavy backing from licensing entities or major broadcasters. At Happy Life, we had some well-developed projects that needed gap financing and the new Hungarian tax break system could help us out, so I gave Andras a call. There were several book properties that I wanted to produce on my own, so that's when I decided to move ahead on my own."

Gustafsson and Erkel's new joint venture is a 50-minute direct-to-video animated project called *Lorange, Muffin and Dartanjang*, which was report-



Lorange, Muffin and Dartanjang



Pettson and Findus

edly produced for a million euros by Happy Life and Baestarts. The toon tells a charming tale about a grandfather, a father and his son, who live together on a strange farm. Based on books by celebrated Scandinavian children's author Barbro Lindgren, this traditionally animated special is unlike anything audiences have seen in recent years.

"Lindgren's book offered a very anarchistic view of bringing up children. The books were first published in 1969 and 1970 and

they really divided people. People either love it or hate it," says Gustafsson. "Some people don't get the humor or question the fact that the son is being raised by a father who is more childish than him, or that the grandfather has multiple personalities. It's a bizarre environment. There are tigers and giraffes on this farm. Also, people were upset that there is no mother figure in the story. Of course, the author responded to the criticisms by saying that she didn't like writing about women!"



Mummy Moo

Gustafsson originally acquired the rights in 1999, and pitched *Lorange* as a TV series at the Cartoon Forum a few years ago, but he faced strict rules and opposition from TV broadcasters. "They were asking too many questions that we didn't want to answer," says Gustafsson.

Flash forward to 2005, when Erkel came

to the rescue. "A few months later after I left Varga, the Budapest studio was shut down," says Erkel. "People were literally banging on my door or calling me hoping to start a new venture. So we were lucky because we could bring together the best people from the former *Mr. Bean* team. When Peter approached me and asked me if I could help him raise financing for the project, using the new 20% tax break offered in Hungary as well as additional European funds and grants, in weeks we had the team up and running in a new studio called Baestarts."

Because of the subject matter, it was difficult to package the project as a TV series, so the team decided to make it a direct-to-DVD feature. However, this fall *Lorange* will get a theatrical release in Sweden thanks to the country's thriving children's matinee screenings, organized by Svensk Film.

Erkel says the style of animation is along the lines of projects we've seen from Los Angeles-based Klasky-Csupo (*Rugrats*, *The Wild Thornberrys*). "From storyboards to editing, everything was done in Budapest, while the script writing, the voice recording, music and post were added in Sweden."

Next up for the Baestarts team is an animated feature based on a series of best-selling books called *Pettson and Finndus* (co-produced by Happy Life, Denmark's A.Film and Germany's TV-Loonland). The feature takes place around Christmas, and centers on a grumpy old man and his clever pet cat. It turns out that the cat is a bit sad around the holidays, because he has never met Santa Claus. "The grumpy old man is very good at building things, so he makes a Santa Claus machine out of wood to make his cat happy again," explains Gustafsson. "We have directors from A-Film in Copenhagen, storyboarders and animation directors in Budapest, ink and paint work done in London's Telemagination with editing work done in Munich and Stockholm. It's a true pan-European effort."

In addition, Studio Baestarts and Sweden's Svensk Film are planning to produce *Mummy Moo*, a 2D feature about the friendship between a stubborn cow and a clever crow. "It's another classic property in Germany and Scandinavia," says Erkel. "They end up building a treehouse together. It's a series of short tales combined in a special way. We're currently in the financing stage for this project." Under Erkel's leadership, the studio also produced two direct-to-video *Angelina Ballerina* specials for Grand Slamm/HIT Entertainment.

Erkel and Gustafsson have also extended their partnership by forming Casa Magica, a venture that focuses on producing live-action features and documentary specials. "One of the live-action projects is based on a fairy tale, so it will incorporate numerous CG visual effects," says Erkel. "We have worked on digitally animated series as well, so we are certainly utilizing all our areas of expertise. It's been a very interesting and productive year for us. The tax break system in Hungary has certainly opened new doors. We certainly feel that being the pioneers in that area has given us an advantage over others." ■

**For more info, visit
www.studiobaestarts.com**



Andras Erkel



Peter Gustafsson



Fast, Funny and Out of Control

Worlds Away relies on 3ds Max to deliver the charming animation of Bob Balaban's new IFC toon series, *Hopeless Pictures*.

Let's say you find yourself in the shoes of Hollywood hyphenate Bob Balaban, the creative force behind IFC's new animated series, *Hopeless Pictures*. You have a few weeks to turn around a great new grownup toon about the trials and tribulations of a fictitious studio head. You want the series to have the improv feel of movies such as *Waiting for Guffman* and *Best in Show*. You've got an amazing cast—Michael McKean as studio head Mel Wax, Lisa Kudrow as his hysterical wife, Jennifer Coolidge as the promiscuous head of development, and the famous Jonathan Katz as his friendly therapist. You want to tackle all kinds of insider Hollywood jokes (the studio, for example, is called Hopeless, in honor of Mel's parents Hope and Les—just as Miramax got its name from Harvey Weinstein's parents!). But how the heck are you going to get the animation done, without resorting to the less-than-cinematic world of Flash?

The answer for the team at New York-based indie animation house Worlds Away Productions was simple. Rely on Autodesk's 3ds Max. As the show's creative director Kim Lee tell us, "Flash is not necessarily the best medium to interpret cinematic ideas for a cartoon medium,"

says Lee. "You don't have a camera, so you have to redraw everything and reposition all the shots. In 3ds Max, we have the ability to use the same 2D artwork—created by artist Brian Smith in PhotoShop. All the characters are drawn in layers. All body parts are broken down and refined so we can use them as puppetry parts."

Once the rotation gets divided to its components, the riggers use Max to map their textures to simple planes. "In 3D, we have eight rigs per character," Lee adds. "You can have eight variations on one character. It's all very fast, no geometry is involved, it's all planes and texture maps. Once you create all the characters for one episode, you're done. When you have to animate a new texture map—we had to develop a new nose map for a special breathing sequence, for example—it takes 15 minutes to create that new shape, then it becomes part of your library."

After the rigging is done, the animatic is broken down to scene and shot numbers. "Max scenes are created for each shot based on the master animatic and handed to the animation department," explains Lee. "Then if there's some split-screen work to be tackled, it's done in Combustion." The key advantage to the Max ap-

proach is that the animators are able to make numerous changes close to delivery date. "We're able to tighten shots, switch close-ups with medium shots and move the camera without having to scale everything as in Flash. It's easier to bridge the live-action movie world with the cartoon world, especially because we're working with someone like Bob Balaban who comes from an old-school movie background."

Of course, 3ds Max offers more flexibility and freedom, but what about the costs. Lee says there is no denying that if you're making a pilot, it's definitely more cost-effective to do it in Flash, but if you're delivering eight episodes (as *Hopeless Pictures* is doing this summer), it's wise to go with Max. "We're able to pump 30 seconds a day, and that's 10 animators creating a 15-minute episode a week. It gets faster as you do more. If we go up to 26 episodes, then it becomes hugely cost effective. Render time is so fast that it's the closest thing you can get to real time. [Lee's Worlds Away Productions uses 3ds Max 7.01, and the team hasn't moved up to 7.5 yet, but he says he is looking closely at version 8 for their next project.]"

As hard as Lee's team worked on the show, they enjoyed the gig because it was certainly something they would watch themselves. "We all loved the material. Usually, we have to convince ourselves that the projects we work on are funny because you just want to get through the job. But *Hopeless Pictures* was something that reminded us of shows such as *Beavis and Butt-Head* and *South Park*. We had a short time to do the animation, but it didn't have to look like *Bambi* or *Final Fantasy*!" ■

Hopeless Pictures airs Fridays at 10 p.m. on the Independent Film Channel (IFC).

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Big Laughs for Little Ones

With a colorful lineup of animated preschool shows, *Tickle U* aims straight for the funny bone.

TELEVISION

Launching a preschool block on Cartoon Network is such a great idea, it's surprising to see it took the cabler so long to run with it. Last month, Ted Turner's animated outlet gave birth to a very cool two-hour home for restless tots and their bewildered parents. Under the appropriately named *Tickle U* banner, this Monday through Friday feature (9 to 11 a.m.) encourages humor, optimism, imagination and cooperation. More important, it is a great place to catch some top quality preschool toons such as *Gerald McBoing Boing*, *Peppa Pig*, *Little Robots*, *Firehouse Tales*, *Gordon the Garden Gnome*, *Harry and His Bucket Full of Dinosaurs* and *Yoko! Jakamoko! Toto!*

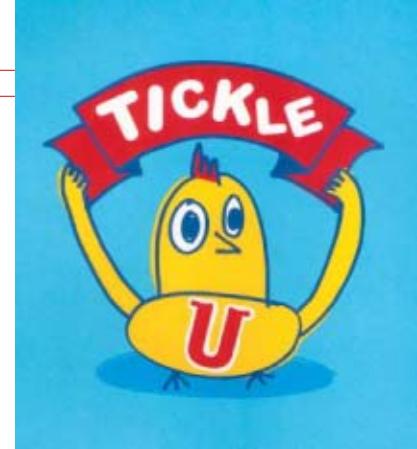
"Many of the preschool programs on the other networks cover the four cognitive skills, but they seem to be missing a sense of joy," says Alice Cahn, VP of programming and development for Cartoon Network. "Young viewers are spending more time watching TV, but they seem to enjoy it less. We wanted to put the fun and joy and silliness back on screen."

Cahn, who held top children's programming jobs at The Markle Foundation, PBS and Sesame Workshop, stresses the importance of including laughter in early development. "Research has shown us that humor is a sign of intelligence: if you're not smart enough, you don't get the joke. When kids are shown the value of optimism, they lash out less."

One of the high priorities for Cahn and her team at Cartoon Network was designing a space where kids weren't pushed to grow up fast. As she explains, "The shows that were already on the air focused on preparing children for school. Many parents believe now that their kids should be reading by the time they enter kindergarten, and that's flat out wrong. Raising kids has become a competitive sport. We're push-



Gordon the Garden Gnome



Harry and his Bucket Full of Dinosaurs



Peppa Pig

Gerald McBoing Boing



ing these youngsters too far too fast and at too young an age."

Another important factor in designing the new block was the length of the shows. Because the U.S. market has overemphasized the 22-minute standard, Cahn wanted to take a page from the European and Asian markets and experiment more with different lengths. "We didn't have to tie ourselves to a specific time frame," she adds. "So we could pick up wonderful British shows such as *Peppa Pig* and *Yoko! Jakamoko! Toto!*, which are five-minutes long. We are also experimenting with repeat patterns because this is an age group that likes to watch the same thing over and over again. They think it's funnier when they know a joke is coming and they can predict what's going to happen."

Tickle U also includes a special constant graphic feature called the Mommy Bar (think CNN's news scroll), which boosts pro-

ductive co-viewing and gives information on the humor curriculum directly to parents and caregivers. Also helping keep things in a nice uniform package are the block's CG-animated hosts and the online component (www.tickleU.com). "From an industry standpoint, we have to be cognizant of the fact that this generation of viewers is used to getting their shows on TV, TiVo, VOD or DVD," adds Cahn. "They won't be able to distinguish whether something is online or on TV or on LeapFrog. So it's up to us to create material that will be experienced across a host of platforms."

Fun, funny and fearless is how Cahn describes the whole package. We might add fantastically animated as well. ■

***Tickle U* airs weekdays on Cartoon Network from 9 to 11 a.m.**



Alice Cahn

Animal Instincts

The Beeb's *I Am Not An Animal* basks in Sundance rays this fall. by Sarah Gurman

Acupuncture for ponies, hiking boots for dogs and Prozac for cats? Maybe it's just L.A., but it feels like we're in the midst of a full-fledged pet amenity revolution. Even the Sundance Channel has just hopped on the animal opulence bandwagon, picking up U.S. TV rights to the BBC's dark comedy series *I Am Not An Animal*, and these half-hour rounds of 2D cel animation are bound to have

viewers in stitches.

The show centers on scientist Mike Simmons' top-secret Project S, an experiment aimed at developing talking animals, which he's conducting inside the laboratories of Vivi-Sec U.K. (Yes, the animals have British accents!) The members of Batch 4, a choice group of subjects, believe they are living the high life inside a cozy home, but in reality, all of their luxury is computer generated.

The animals—Philip, a literary-minded horse; Winona, a prima donna bulldog; Hugh, a sex-crazed monkey; Claire, a self-pitying rat; Mark, a headstrong sparrow



Now these human-like animals have to find out if they can really swim with actual homo sapiens.

I Am Not An Animal marks the first animated comedy project for Steve Coogan and Henry Normal's London-based house of laughs, Baby Cow Productions. Normal (*The Sketch Show*, *24 Hour Party People*) and Coogan (*The All Star Comedy Show*, *I'm Alan Partridge*) serve as exec producers with writer and director Peter Baynham (*Bob and Margaret*, *Monkey Dust*), animation director Tim Searle (*2DTV*) and producer Richard Bennett (*2DTV*). Though the show initially took some flack for depicting lab animals as if living in a four-star hotel, *I Am Not An Animal* has

already received several European broadcast awards.

"This outrageous and hilarious BBC



and Liam, a spaced-out rabbit—actually enjoy passing their time in the lab sipping fine wine, gabbing about celeb crushes and daydreaming about the latest trends in London. Their

lavish life comes to a halt when animal rights activists "rescue" them from Project S. While in transit from the Vivi-Sec U.K. labs, the activists realize they have a group of talking animals on their hands. The driver of the escape van freaks out and crashes, unleashing the fuzz and feathered ones onto the real world.

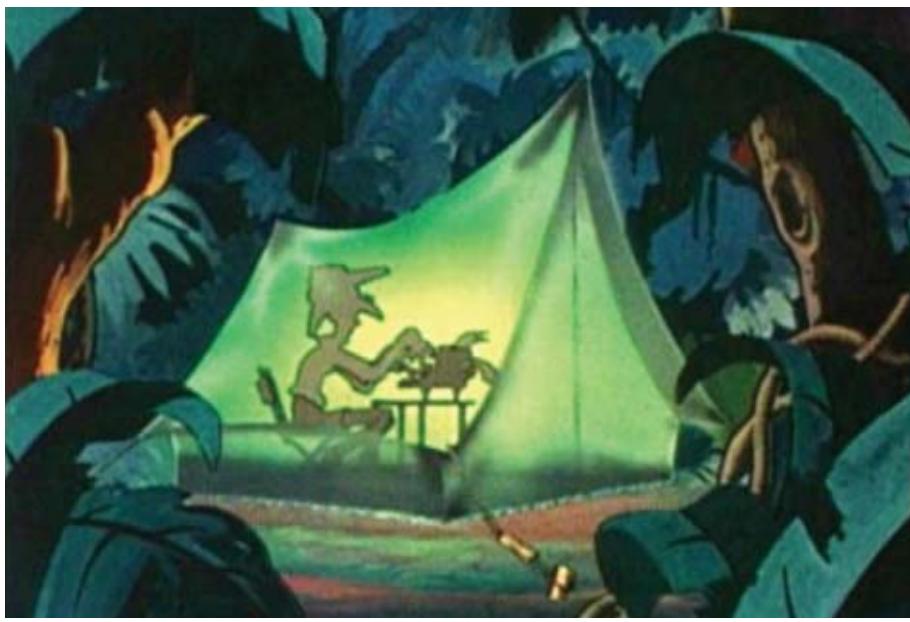
series dovetails perfectly with Sundance Channel's recently announced strategy to broaden our offerings, add more series, and bring humor into the mix," notes Laura Michalchyshyn, the Sundance Channel's executive director of programming and marketing.

Looks like these assertive animals will be a perfect match for the indie-minded cabler, which was set up by one-time horse whisperer, Robert Redford. ■

I Am Not An Animal premieres on the Sundance Channel Wednesday, Oct. 5 at 6 p.m. The show repeats Thursdays at 6 p.m., Fridays at 11 p.m. and Saturdays and Tuesdays at 8:30 p.m.



TELEVISION



A Cartoon Alley Paved in Gold

David Hand's *Animaland* series kicks off a fantastic weekly anthology of classic shorts on TCM.

Facing a new fall TV season can be tough for fans of traditional animation who have a soft spot for the great vintage shorts of the '40s and '50s. However, the visionary programmers at Turner Classic Movies have prepared the perfect antidote for some of the crass, cheaply made junk we might encounter on TV in 2005. Cable's home of classic cinema welcomes a regular Saturday morning series to its lineup this September: *Cartoon Alley*, which showcases rarely seen titles from the early years of animation with many drawn from the rich TCM library of MGM and Warner Bros. shorts. The series goes weekly with a special three-week arc devoted to the work of Disney top animator David Hand, who directed *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Bambi* before he moved to the U.K. to head up Gaumont British Animation for producer J. Arthur Rank.

Nine of Hand's delightful *Animaland* shorts from 1948 through 1950—*The Australian Platypus*, *The Cuckoo* and *The Lion* (Sept. 3); *The Ostrich*, *It's a Lovely Day* and *The House Cat* (Sept. 10); *Ginger Nutt's Bee Brother*, *Ginger Nutt's Christmas Circus* and *Ginger Nutt's Forest Dragon* (Sept. 17) are scheduled this

month. Most of these cartoons were thought to be lost forever after the studio shut down its facility. Years later, film archivist Ken Kramer bought a box of used 35mm films and rediscovered Hand's legacy by accident. [Director Joe Dante and film historian Leonard Maltin helped Kramer identify the shorts as *Animaland* cartoons!]

"We had the opportunity to use this rich library [over 1,000 titles] of all the theatrical MGM cartoons before the '60s and the pre-1949 Warner cartoons," says Charlie Tabesh, head of programming at TCM. "As was the case with the David Hand series, we are open to acquiring material from other libraries, such as the Ray Harryhausen shorts, for example, or the Paramount Popeye cartoons."

Both Tabesh and TCM's senior programming manager Dennis Millay mention that other TV and cable outlets have been neglecting this rich area of animation in recent years. Cartoon Network and Boomerang used to be a good spot to catch some of the best toons from the Golden Age of animation, but both outlets have moved on to more modern pastures of late.

Animated shorts have always been part of the TCM programming menu, but the cabler often used them as fillers or during its popular 31 Days of Oscar or Christmas programming stunts. "We would also air cartoons that were spoofs of the classic mov-

ies right before we aired the main feature," says Tabesh. "Also popular are the cartoons that include caricatures of the popular movie stars of the era."

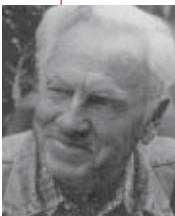
Hosted by familiar TCM personality Ben Mankiewicz, *Cartoon Alley* began its run last November with a show devoted to Clark Gable caricatures. Back then, the series only aired once a month, but, starting in September, a new package airs every Saturday. The season will include episodes devoted to Warner Bros.' *Sniffles the Mouse* (1939), MGM's *Droopy Dog* (1943, '45), Warner Bros.' Peter Lorre caricatures (for Halloween), MGM's *Benny Burro* shorts, as well as more familiar characters such as Tweety Bird and Elmer Fudd. The November 26 outing is devoted to the debut appearances of Foghorn Leghorn, The Goofy Gophers and Marvin the Martian.

"We love to find obscure characters and showcase fresh titles," says Millay. "We plan to do 26 episodes each year, and then have a repeat cycle and come back with a new season. We will also feature some of the black-and-white titles that were colorized for Cartoon Network and Turner Network in their original formats."

"It's wonderful to be able to see the connection between these cartoons with the live-action movies of their specific era," says Tabesh. "Many of these titles truly reflect the studios that made them. For example, the music that you hear in some of the Warner Bros. cartoons were the same ones owned by the studio. MGM cartoons would use songs from *The Wizard of Oz* and *Singin' in the Rain*. You can really learn a lot about the studio culture of the period."

Millay echoes the thoughts of many industry fans when he says, "I think the animation of that period is incredibly beautiful—in fact, it's much better than most of the stuff done on computers today." ■

Cartoon Alley airs Saturdays at 11:30 a.m. on TCM, beginning Sept. 3.



David Hand

The Padded Cel

Clichés Doesn't Rhyme with Glitches



by Robby London

Was there even the slightest doubt? A nano-second of hesitation? My editor wanted an article about clichés. Who ya gonna call? *The Padded Cel*, that's who—the Funk and Wagnall of clichés. My response to the editor was cleverly formulated to assure him he'd come to the right place: "Show me the money."

While I'm waiting, let's dive right into the first of a long series of cliché columns. This month we'll cover some of the most clichéd episodic animation story premises—the ones I've personally used again and again in every animated series for which I wrote. (I'm actually the only animation writer ever to be honored with an Environmental Media Award for recycling ... stories.)

The "evil twin" story: In which a look-alike of the protagonist, (either robotic, disguised, or literally a biological twin) perpetrates evil for which the protagonist is blamed. Of course this cliché is not limited to animation. In fact you'll be seeing it this fall on NBC's new version of *The Apprentice* as—in a coup of creative casting—Donald Trump's evil twin is portrayed by...Martha Stewart!

Illustration by Mercedes Milligan
The ONLY way you can tell them apart is that instead of saying "You're fired," Martha's signature phrase will be, "Parole revoked!" (BS&P nixed the catchy slogan Martha coined in prison: "Get your finger out of my casserole, bitch!")

The "forgotten birthday" story: In which the protagonist feels bad be-

cause none of her friends remembers that today is her birthday. Of course this is just a ploy by the friends to decoy her from the big surprise party they plan to throw her at the end of the story. In the category of life imitates art, my friends are FAR more disciplined and dedicated than the friends in these stories. They have managed to perpetuate this ruse by pretending to ignore my birthday over the course of YEARS. Wow, I'll bet

ly ghoulish deadline to work all night in a rat-infested studio somewhere near Hollywood and Western, with neither inheritance nor overtime.

The mysterious stranger: In which a weird, frightening outcast arrives in the community and is considered a pariah—until he surprises everyone by saving the day! Apparently Michael Ovitz put down the script before he got to the saving-the-day part.

The toy magic set that does real magic: In which a protagonist buys a magic set in a musty old junk store and finds that it can perform real spells and cause real trouble. This clichéd story has inspired many studio CEOs and their own Merlins, the creative accountants with those amazing "magical spreadsheets" which actually make real-life profit participations vanish into thin air!

Of course we've yet to touch on the clichéd series concepts. You know, the reluctant, anguished superhero...the young witch mastering her powers...the innocent little girl with the big chutzpah. That's right...all stale clichés—which have probably grossed \$5 billion collectively in the past 10 years in the form of *Spider-Man*, *Sabrina* and *Dora the Explorer* or *Madeline* respectively. Hmmm. Do you suppose maybe there's a reason they are clichés? Could be we're on to something here! ■

As we were going to press it came to our attention that this column was hijacked and written by Robby London's unfunny twin.



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

they're planning a really big surprise at my funeral!

Spend the night in a haunted house: In which the protagonist(s) must last until dawn, enduring ghoulish goings-on, in order to qualify for an inheritance. This cliché story was no doubt first created by a non-union animator forced by a tru-

Time for Some Danish!

Cartoon Forum gives TV animation producers many good reasons to spend a few fall days in the toon-loving town of Kolding. by Ramin Zahed

If you want to sample the best of European TV animation, you might want to book yourself a trip to Kolding, Denmark this year. Why Kolding? Well, that's where the crème de la crème of Euro TV toonmakers and investors will be holding court, September 21-24. Sponsored by the European MEDIA program for the European Union, the annual Cartoon Forum offers a chance for industry pros to present their animated projects to potential investors from 29 different European countries. To date, over 301 Cartoon Forum projects (a total budget of 980 million euros) have secured financing. These figures are nothing to sneeze at, especially if you're a heart-broken American, wishing a similar set up were available to U.S. TV animation producers!

"This year the Forum is hosting 67 new TV series projects, representing a total budget of 233 million euros for 412 hours of programming," according to the event's managing directors Marc Vandeweyer and Corinne Jenart. "It's fitting that the Forum takes place in Kolding this year because there has been a veritable boom in Scandinavian animation. This is seen in the recent success of the feature *Terkel in Trouble* (by Nordisk Film and A.Film) and *Strings* (by Bald Film), as well as the celebrated work of Jannik Hastrup and the impressive number of productions under way at A.Film, such as *Asterix and the Vikings* and *The Ugly Duckling and Me*."

Of course, any curious observer of the animation scene would like to know if the organizers were able to spot any trends in the Euro toon scene in 2005. One fact that jumps at you is that the U.K. still continues to dominate the field, with 19 projects (that's 27% of total entries) representing the Union Jack at the event. Spain is next with nine animated shows, followed by Germany with seven, France and

Ireland with six each and Italy with four. Denmark and Sweden clock in with three projects, while Iceland and Belgium have two shows at the Forum. Poland and Slovenia are two new additions to the mix and there are 16 new projects with partnerships from Hungary, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Poland.

The technological breakdown is also quite revealing. Overall, 28 of the featured shows use CG animation, 23 are traditionally animated, 11 are hybrids, four are listed as Flash shows, one is billed as a puppet-animated project and one uses live actors! (Yes, we're also wondering how that one live-action show plans to sneak under the radar at an animation event!)

One other service that Cartoon Forum provides is offering a breakdown of all shows by character and storyline. This year, there are more animated humans (33) than animals (10), with only eight shows featuring a group of animal friends and four shows dealing with magical creatures such as vampires, ghosts, monsters and elves. They also found two shows that deal with



TV-Loonland's
Johnnnny Mutton
(Germany)

Lupus Films and Picture Production Co.'s
The Pinky & Perky Show (U.K.)



fish blowing bubbles' *Fridgees* (Germany)



K Creativ's *A Sperm's Life* (Sweden)





GB Animation's *The Grimoire and Talisman* (U.K.)

Lion Toons' *Cosme the Astronaut* (Spain)



plants—one is about the food that lives in a fridge (Don't ask!), and the other has mushroom protagonists. Tom Cruise and his scientologist posse will be happy to know that there are seven shows centered on friendly aliens from other planets. *Animation Magazine*

azine's favorite section is the "without category" of the report, which you can also file under "Only in Europe!" This is where you find those gutsy toons about that ever-suffering son of God, Jesus, a band of bubblegum friends, dustbin thingies and—what else?—a happy-go-lucky team of sperm adventurers (*A Sperm's Life* by Sweden's K Creativ).

Some of the titles that caught our attention were Poseidon Films' *Aesop's Fables* (U.K.), Lion Toons' *Cosme the Astronaut* (Spain), Telemagination's *Dooley* (U.K.), Monster Animation's *Fluffy Gardens* (Ireland), Magma Films' *Footballer's Husband* (Ireland), fish blowing bubbles' *Fridgees* (Germany), Icon Animation's *Hop & Calamity* (Spain), B.R.B. Internacional's *Khudayana* (Spain), Millimage's *Piccolo & Saxo* (France), Calon's *Safehouse Hotel* (U.K.), TV-Loonland's *Johnny Mutton* (Germany) and Brown Bag Films' *Wobbly Land* (Ireland).

Lupus Films and Picture Production Company's new (52x11) animated series *Pinky & Perky* will also bow at Cartoon Forum. The CG-animated show features updated versions of the two singing piglet puppets which had their own show on U.K. television from 1957 to the early '70s.

"We're taking our show to the Forum because it's the best way to get instant access to all the European financers, broadcasters and distributors," says Lupus Films' managing director Ruth Fielding. "It also allows us to see what other producers' shows are like and what the general trends of the market are."

Fielding notes that the biggest challenge facing indie toon producers is keeping budgets low enough to get financed without compromising the quality of the show. "Buyers want brands which are far-reaching on

all platforms from TV to film, merchandising, the Internet, licensing and publishing."

Among the other quality debuts at the event is *Safehouse Hotel*, a new 26x30 Flash animation series produced by Robin Lyons' new company, Calon. Described as a cross between *Fawlty Towers* and *The Prisoner*, the show follows the adventures of a blissfully ignorant pair of parents whose hotel is listed as a safe house for global criminals. That means the kids in the family get to deal with spies and villains each week. The show was created by comic illustrator Mike Collins, penned by Peter David and illustrated by animator Jose Luis Agreda. As Lyons explains, "The creation of Calon has given us the chance to take a refreshingly new approach to our work. We're taking a different attitude, bringing on board new stimulating talent."

Another Cartoon Forum participant is GB Animation Company producer Piers Godden who is taking the beautifully drawn and imaginative *The Grimoire and Talisman* (13 x 26) to the Forum. The show is about a young knight and his apprentice sorcerer who have been accidentally transported to the modern world.

"The exposure of Cartoon Forum is second to none," says Godden. "I don't think there is any other event in the world where you can get so many decision-makers to sit down for 30 minutes and give you their undivided attention. No mobile phones, no other pitchers queuing up—just you and them in a darkened room! Scary, huh?"

So what kind of advice does Godden have for others planning to brave the process? "The first and most important thing is the belief that you have a great project and that others think the same way," he says. "Once you have this belief all you need is determination and stamina, a determination to get all the parties together and the stamina to keep going through the financial jungle ... Luckily, I believe that *The Grimoire and Talisman* has a magical quality that you rarely see. Combine this with the amazing design work of Kit Wallis and we're onto a winner!" ■

For more info about this year's Cartoon Forum, visit www.cartoon-media.be.

On the Short List

Each year at Cartoon Forum, a special **Cartoon D'Or** award is given to an animator whose short project has been honored at other animation festivals in Holland, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, U.K. and France. The jurors are Karsten Kierlerich, Philippe Leclerc, Peter Lord and Corinne Jenart. This year's nominated shorts are

- City Paradise* by Gaelle Denis (U.K.)
- Falling* by Peter Kaboth (Germany)
- Flatlife* by Jonas Geirnaert (Belgium)
- Jo Jo in the Stars* by Marc Craste (U.K.)
- Little Things* by Daniel Greaves (U.K.)



Junior Snap Shots

Giving Kids What They Want!

In anticipation of the MIPCOM Jr. market in Cannes (Oct. 15-16), we spoke to several producers and distributors of animated fare for children about the TV climate and the state of independents in the business. Here's a sampler of what they had to say:

DIC Entertainment

New Series: *autoBANZAI*

Our Source: Andy Heyward, DIC's chairman and CEO

What's It About? *autoBANZAI* is the company's latest boys property, which is set in the largest automotive store in the world. Using state-of-the-art technology, the fast-paced show encompasses all forms of racing, including motocross, street, stock car and monster truck. Like *Trollz*, *autoBANZAI* has a major online component, where fans can buy, trade and assemble their virtual wheels.

At MIPCOM Jr., DIC will also unveil a second season of its peppy *Trollz* series, as well as a third season of the evergreen *Strawberry Shortcake* show (*World of Friends*, *Berry Fairy Tales*, *Cooking Up Fun* and *Berry Blossom Festival*).

Other News: In addition to releasing the new *Inspector Gadget's Biggest Caper Ever* CG movie on DVD (with animation by Canada's Mainframe), the company is also in charge of licensing and merchandising for McDonald's kids brand. Viewers can also look forward to a new *Strawberry Shortcake* series and the *Finley the Fire Engine* show on the DIC Kids Network later this year.

In the Works: DIC is also developing a new young girls' series called *Horseland*. The show has a huge web component (www.horseland.com) and fans can visit the site to adopt, buy and groom their own virtual equine pals.

On Going CG: "Initially, I had some mixed feelings about animating *Inspector Gadget* in CG, but the new project had a great script by Phil Harnage, who knows the character very well. Plus, we decided to go the CG route because it's a hot trend right now, and we wanted to see how it would work for some of the characters."



Andy Heyward

Cool Quote: "If you want to succeed in this business, you have to stay insecure! You need to be constantly seeking the best creative forces everywhere. Find the best characters, stories, writers and properties. Then create the right infrastructure to bring it to the marketplace."

MGA Entertainment

New Series: *Bratz*

Our Source: Company founder and CEO Isaac Larian

What's It About? The hugely popular dolls with a "passion for fashion" get their own CG-animated TV series, courtesy of Mike Young Productions. Cloe, Yasmin, Jade and Sasha scoop stories for their own teen magazine!

Development History: Since their introduction in June 2001, MGA's sexy Bratz dolls have taken the market by storm, giving Mattel's Barbie major competition (and a tough legal battle as well!). Today, the toyline has over 350 licensees.

In His Own Words: "Despite the costs, we decided to go with CG

animation because I think 2D is passé and computer animation gives the dolls more life. To me the quality of your product is the most important factor. Children are very smart. You can't cheat them. If you spend more dollars and give them better entertainment, they will reward you with their loyalty."



Isaac Larian poses with his dolls.

The Road Ahead:

"Our biggest challenge is to keep the momentum and creativity going. Our sales are up 19%, but to survive in the toy and entertainment business, you have to come up with new ideas and gimmicks every year."

Cool Quotes: "Imitation may be the best form of flattery, but we are not flattered by Mattel's imitation of our products. That's why we have a law suit against them!" He adds, "Our dolls were a hit because they are multi-ethnic and multicultural. Not everyone is a six-foot-tall blonde with blue eyes. Some of us have brown eyes and olive skin!"

Beyond Bratz: MGA's boys series, *Alien Racers* airs on Fox Kids in the fall. The company's new direct-to-DVD feature *Rock Angels* will be distributed by Fox in upcoming weeks.

Trivia: Bratz doll Yasmin is named after Larian's own daughter who was one of the first to approve the design when it was first pitched to her dad. She was 11 at the time!



TELEVISION

Portfolio Entertainment

New Series: *Carl*

Our Sources: Lisa Olfman and Joy Rosen, co-founders, presidents and series' exec producers

What's It About? A slacker teen discovers that having a clone doubles his daily dilemmas!

In Their Words: "The idea of cloning was pulled from today's headlines. We also noticed that there was a dearth of programming for boys that

wasn't action-based. We wanted a project that addressed the issues faced by tween boys, the same way series such as *Daria* or *Braceface* did for girls. Visually, we felt Flash would deliver a clean look, so we were very pleased with the direction Ottawa's PIP studio took with the animation. It also allows us to have more creative control and keep the production in Ottawa."

Track Record: The Company's catalogue includes *RoboRoach* (52x30), *Toad Patrol* (26x30) and *Groundling Marsh* (65x30).

In Production: Portfolio is producing a new animated special for Teletoon titled *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins*, based on the popular book by Eric Kimmel. The show will premiere in Dec. 2006.

The Big Picture: "We think business has come roaring back. A lot of companies have used up their inventories, so suddenly they have more opportunities to fill up their slots. Shakedowns in the broadcasting world have also resulted in a more stable market, which means companies are more secure about their position in the field."



National Geographic Kids Programming & Production

New Series: Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies (26X11)

Our Source: Donna Friedman Meir, president, Kids' Programming and Production

What's It About? Wild elephant mom takes care of a cute cast of baby animals such as Bo the cheetah cub, Karla the zebra foal, Max the elephant calf and baby monkeys Pip, Flip and Chip!

In Her Words: "This project speaks to the core of what our company is all about. It combines the best of what National Geographic is known for—extraordinary footage and understanding of the natural world—and pairs it with entertaining, silly, funny and playful animated characters in a classic and relevant preschool series."

Development History: The show is based on an original concept by Wild Brain animation studio and George Evelyn. The show's 2D animation is delivered by King Rollo Films under the direction of Leo Nielsen (Paz, Maisy), with a script by Andrew Yerkes (Pocoyo, Bear in the Big Blue House).

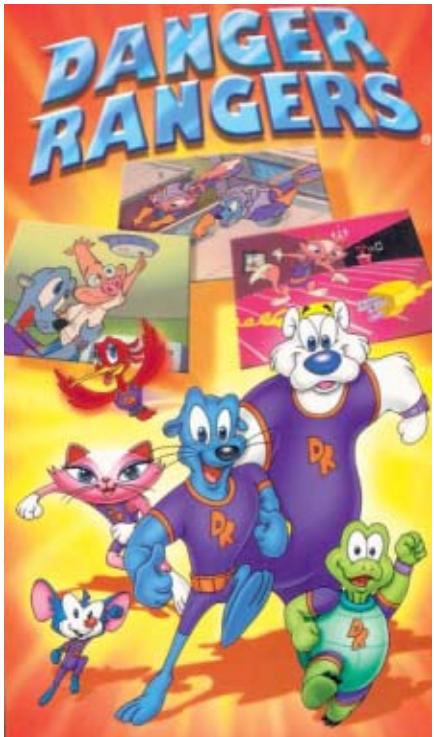


Donna
Friedman Meir

Cool Quote: "Mama Mirabelle is not your typical mom character! She's an elephant and not afraid to get muddy with the best of them!"

The Big Picture: "Our goal is to stand out from the pack. We recognize that the networks and cable divisions have a lot of choice and limited shelf space. We want to be where the kids are, whether it's the BBC, TF1, Nick, Cartoon Network or Kids' WB! When we first launched, we had to convince people that we were going to be funny, hip, contemporary and entertaining. We don't need to have those conversations anymore!"

Educational Adventures



New Series: Danger Rangers

Our Source: Michael Moore, co-founder and CEO

What's It About? Sully, Kitty, Burble, Burt, Gabriela and Squeeky are six colorful animal characters that teach kids how to make better safety-related decisions.

Development History: Moore and his team wanted to create a show that would empower kids to "think safe, play safe and be safe." The top-notch production staff includes exec producers Howard Kazanjian (*Star Wars*) and Larry Huber (*The Chalk Zone*, *The Powerpuff Girls*), voice director Ginny McSwain (*Jimmy Neutron*) and composer Randy Rogel (*Animaniacs*). The show's traditional animation is produced in the company's Burbank facility and Korea's GMIC Studio.

Track Record: The show has been performing quite well for several public TV stations around the country, including Orange County, New Jersey and Charlotte.

In His Words: "Our plan was to create a multi-media platform based on animation because nothing is as powerful and effective in captivating children's attention as animation."



Michael Moore

The Big Picture: "Obviously, it's a very difficult market today, but we try to make sure that we find the right partner. We're patient and don't have to jump into bed with anyone. Fortunately, we have the strong ratings to back up our entertainment and educational value."

Cool Quote: "I'm a firm believer that you don't have to be 'edgy' to appeal to the five-to-seven age group. You win them over with the premium look, the wit and the top-notch music. It's the older age group that's concerned with being hip and edgy."

Comet Entertainment

New Titles: *Toto Sapore* and the Magic Story of the Pizza, *Aida degli Alberi*, The Adventures of Neve & Gliz

Our Sources: Raquel Benitez, Comet's CEO and Carmen Llanos, Comet's COO

What Are They About?

Toto Sapore and *Aida* are two animated features by Medusa Films. The first tells the incredible story of the discovery of pizza while the second is about the epic battle between the peaceful inhabitants of a forest world and the invading armies of a desert empire. The *Neve & Gliz* series features Neve the snowflake and Gliz the ice cube—popular mascots of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy. The 52 one-minute package features numerous gags exploring all the amusing aspects of the winter sports.

Track Record: The Toronto-based company (which also has offices in Spain) has had some significant growth in recent months, not only in the distribution and production arena, but also in its Vitamin Cartoons division, through which it offers animation services from script to post-production. Comet creates, designs, builds and delivers both long and short-form animation content for movies, broadcasters, online and gaming outlets.

In the Pipeline: A U.S.-Canadian animation co-production titled *Running Wild*, a DVD home video release with Fanciful Arts Animation titled *Santa Vs. Claus*; a four-picture co-production deal with Turin-based Lanterna Magica, and a 26x26 animated series, inspired by the work of Spanish artist Joan Ripolles titled



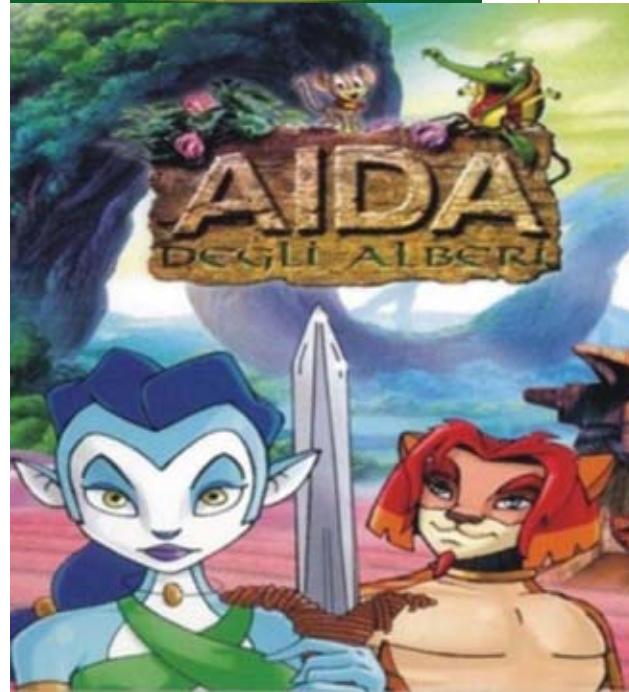
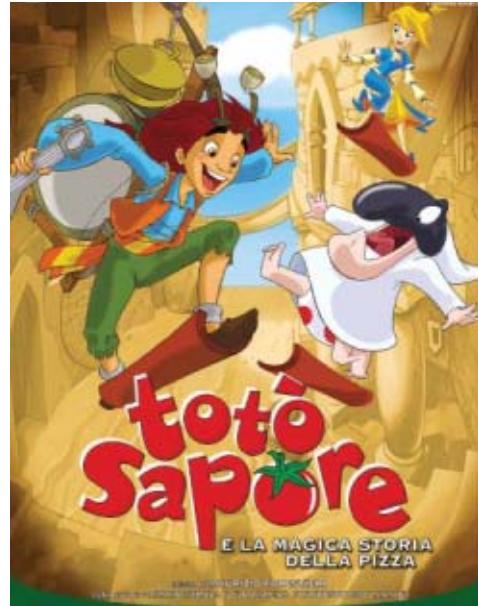
Raquel Benitez



Carmen Llanos

Sculpture Garden.

Cool Quote: "What we like most about our work is the fact that each new show is an adventure and an opportunity to show and give the best that we have to offer. Artistic talent is our foundation, and every project begins with a traditional art process. While technology is used to enhance and enable production, projects are primarily driven by



artistic and creative values."

Side Project: Raquel Benitez is also the author of a first book ever written in Spanish about the animation process titled *El proceso de la animacion*. ■

The New Fall TV Round-Up

Your handy guide to the new toons popping up on broadcast and cable outlets this season:

4KIDS ENTERTAINMENT

Yu-Gi-Oh! G/X

Synopsis: G/X is the next generation where new legends are born. Set years after the previous *Yu-Gi-Oh!* series, G/X follows a new and exciting generation of duelists at the prestigious Duel Academy.

Production Companies: 4Kids Entertainment, Inc. & Nihon Ad Systems, Inc. (NAS)

Premieres: Cartoon Network Fall 2005

Creator: Kazuki Takahashi



SIGMA 6

Synopsis: SIGMA 6 is the code name for a new group of highly trained covert special mission operatives. This unique team uses cutting-edge technology and state-of-the-art gear to battle the forces of evil wherever they find it especially against their archenemy, the infamous COBRA.

Production Companies: 4Kids Entertainment, Inc., Gonzo Digimation, DLE, Hasbro

Premieres: September 10, 2005

Creators: Hasbro and Gonzo Digimation

Magical DoReMi

Synopsis: Join this magical, musical odyssey where three young girls and their best friends embark on a journey through the secret world of becoming full-fledged witches. These witches-in-training are armed with the power of music and the desire to make the world a better place.

Production Companies: 4Kids Entertainment, Inc. & TOEI Animation

Premieres: September 10, 2005

Creator: TOEI Animation



CARTOON NETWORK'S [ADULT SWIM]

Stroker & Hoop

Synopsis: The show makes its debut with six new episodes following the misadventures of John Stroker, a private eye still mastering the art of lock-picking, car hood-sliding and keeping his gun from falling out of his waistband when he bends over at the grocery store.

Production Company: The Williams St.

Premiere: Sunday, August 28, at midnight

Creators: Casper Kelly and Jeff Olsen



The Boondocks

Synopsis: *The Boondocks* is a new animated television comedy based on Aaron McGruder's award-winning comic strip of the same name. Like the comic strip, *The Boondocks* is a provocative family-based comedy brimming with social relevance and satire.



Premieres: October 2, at 11 p.m.

Creator: Aaron McGruder

Production Companies: Rebel Base and Hudlin Entertainment in association with Sony Pictures Television

Squidbillies

Synopsis: Five million years ago, the Atlantic Ocean covered North America all the way to the Ohio



Valley. As the ocean receded to form our present-day geography, a family of squids was stranded in a remote setting in the North Georgia mountains.

Premieres: October 16 at midnight

Creators: Dave Willis and Jim Fortier

12 oz Mouse

Synopsis: Fond of beer and caught in a world of espionage and love, 12 oz. Mouse unknowingly delights in odd jobs.



Premiere Date: October 16 at 12:30 a.m.

Creator: Matt Maiellaro

Moral Orel

Synopsis: Orel is an 11 year-old boy who loves church with an unbridled enthusiasm for piety and frequent misinterpretations of religious morals that lead to disastrous results, including self-mutilation and crack addiction. No matter how much trouble he gets into, his reverence always keeps him cheery.

Premieres: November 13 at 12:15 a.m.

Creator: Dino Stamatopoulos

Lucy: Daughter of the Devil (special)

Synopsis: Lucy is a young girl who just moved to San Francisco. Her father, who happens to be Satan, is understandably concerned, particularly after she starts dating a guy named Jesus.

Premieres: Oct. 30 at 12:15 a.m.

Minoriteam (special)

Synopsis: A team of superheroes, composed exclusively of members of minority groups, joins forces to fight against discrimination. Jewcano, Fasto, Dr. Wang, El Jefe and Quickstop use the power of racial stereotypes to right societal wrongs, one slur at a time.

Premiere Date: November 6 at 12:15 a.m.

Creators: Adam de la Pena, Todd James and Peter Girardi

CARTOON NETWORK

IGPX

Synopsis: The year is 2048 and the IGPX has become the world's most popular sport. IGXP takes viewers inside the world of the Immortal Grand Prix with a team on their way to the championship race.

Production Companies:

Cartoon Network
and Production I.G.

Premieres: Nov. 5 at 10 p.m.



Naruto

Synopsis: An antisocial boy at a ninja academy doesn't know that he is possessed by an evil demon. As he evolves as a ninja, his inner demon gives him more and more powers, but he must learn not to destroy others around him.

Production Companies:

Produced by Pierrot Co. and distributed by ShoPro/VIZ in the U.S.

Premieres: Sept. 10 at 9 p.m.



BoBoBo BoBoBo

Synopsis: In this silly action series, BoBoBo can talk to and understand hair. With the help of his glorious blond Afro hair, he is out to save the land from the Hair Patrol posse and their leader, Baldy Bald, who is

forcing everyone to be follically challenged.

Production Company: Toei Animation.

Premieres: Oct. 8 at 10:30 p.m.

DIC KIDS NETWORK



Strawberry Shortcake

Synopsis: The Strawberry Shortcake stories follow the good-natured and loveable adventures of the

gentle pink-wearing girl and her friends who live together in the magical world of Strawberryland.

Production Company: DIC Entertainment

Premieres: January 2006

Creator: American Greetings



Finley the Fire Engine

Synopsis: A heartwarming show about everyone's favorite young fire engine and the fun he has with all of his truck friends in a town called Friendville.

Production Companies: Hallmark Entertainment and Kick Start Productions

Premieres: January 2006

Creator: Jason Netter, Kickstart Productions

DISCOVERY KIDS



Tutenstein Halloween Special: "Day of the Undead"

Episode Description: Our mummy/hero learns about Halloween and decides he wants to go trick-or-treating. But when Cleo explains that she and her older friends are going to a haunted house, Tut tries to impress everyone by summoning a real ghost.

Production Companies: Porchlight Entertainment and Discovery Kids

Premieres: October 29 at 8 a.m.



Time Warp Trio Halloween Special: "Tut Tut"

Episode Description: Joe, Sam and Fred are unexpectedly warped back to Ancient Egypt in the middle of a robbery! After being framed by an evil priest, and then saved by Fred's snazzy sneakers, things go awry and the boys nearly get mummified.

Production Companies: Soupnuts, WGBH and Discovery Kids

Premieres: October 29 at 10:30 a.m.

DISNEY CHANNEL/TOON DISNEY



Little Einsteins

Synopsis: Designed to provide preschoolers with new ways to experience

music, Little Einsteins introduces four relatable kids, Leo, Annie, Quincy and June, who go on grand adventures to real-world locations, with a dilemma to solve and a specific goal to reach, with the aid of Rocket, their dynamic escort.

Production Company: Curious Pictures

Premieres: Mid-October on Playhouse Disney programming block on Disney Channel

Executive Producer: Eric Weiner

Handy Manny

Synopsis: Wilmer Valderrama (*That '70s Show*) stars as the voice of Latino hero Manny Garcia, a helpful, determined young man who, with the assistance of his eclectic set of talking tools, is the town's expert when it comes to repairing all that's not working.



Production Company: Nelvana

Premieres: January 2006

Creator: Rick Gitelson

Emperor's New School



Synopsis: Based on the Walt Disney's theatrical feature, *The Emperor's New Groove*, *Emperor's New School* is a new animated series set in the Incan public school system. Kuzco

just had a birthday which means he's finally ready to become the official emperor...but first he must graduate from Kuzco Academy and foil the scheming partnership of Yzma and Kronk to reclaim his throne.

Production Company: Walt Disney Television Animation

Premieres: March 2006

Executive Producer: Bobs Gannaway

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse

Synopsis: Mickey Mouse Clubhouse engages preschool viewers and their parents/caregivers in an interactive adventure. In each episode, Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Daisy, Goofy and Pluto help viewers solve a specific age-appropriate problem.

Production Company: Walt Disney Television Animation

Premieres: March 2006

JETIX

Get Ed

Synopsis: Get Ed follows the adventures of Ed, a boy genetically created from an ancient artifact, who works as a surreptitious cybersleuth, foiling identity thefts and solving other information-based crimes while toiling as a futuristic messenger service.



Production Companies: Red Rover in association with Walt Disney Television Animation

Premiere Date:

September 19 at 7:30 p.m. on Toon Disney; September 24 at 9:00 a.m. on ABC Family

Creator: Andy Knight

KIDS' WB!

Coconut Fred's Fruit Salad Island



Synopsis: Set sail for the silliest spot in the Seven Seas, Coconut Fred's Fruit Salad Island, a tropical island of

unparalleled beauty. Bananas, melons, mangos and other lucky fruit live on this tiny jewel of an isle, located deep in the middle of the little-known Fruit Salad Ocean. They share their peaceful paradise with Fred, a wild coconut.

Production Company: Warner Bros. Animation

Premieres: Saturday, September 17 at 8:30 a.m.

Creators: Don Oriolo and Sammy Oriti

Loonatics Unleashed

Synopsis: Set 700 years in the future, Loonatics Unleashed stars an ensemble cast of six superheroes who are descendants of the Looney Tunes. Living in the year 2772, in the perpetual twilight of Acmetropolis, where supernatural phenomena are the norm, our team becomes imbued with super powers after a massive meteor knocks Earth off its axis.



Production Company: Warner Bros. Animation

Premieres: Saturday, September 17 at 9 a.m.

Executive Producer: Sander Schwartz



Johnny Test

Synopsis: What kid wouldn't dream of having a baseball bat

that hits home runs every time? Or growing gills that let him breathe underwater? Or how about zooming to the moon in a personal spaceship? Well, Johnny Test can do all those things and more, thanks to his twin prodigy inventor sisters, in this outrageous fantasy-action-comedy.

Production Company: Warner Bros. Animation
Premieres: Saturday, September 17 at 10:30 a.m.
Creator: Scott Fellows

NICKELODEON

Danny Phantom: "The Ultimate Enemy" (1 Hour Special)

Synopsis: It's time for the Danny and his classmates to take their Career Aptitude Test (CAT), and Danny is freaking out.

Production Company: Nicktoons Productions
Premieres: September 16
Creator: Butch Hartman



SpongeBob SquarePants: "Where's Gary?" (1/2 hr special)

Synopsis: While trying to beat a paddle-ball world record, SpongeBob forgets to feed Gary for several weeks. So Gary runs away to downtown Bikini Bottom where he is taken in by a kindly old woman who mistakes him for one of her many deceased pets.

Production Companies: Nicktoons Productions and United Plankton Pictures
Premieres: November 11
Creator: Stephen Hillenburg



NICKTOONS

Edgar & Ellen

Synopsis: The precocious, prank-loving twins from Charles Ogden's popular series welcome you to Nod's Limbs, a town so saccharine sweet it will make your teeth ache! In a place as goody-goody as this, no one would dare think to do anything unexpected—except for Edgar and Ellen, the pajama-clad siblings who live in the tall, creepy mansion on the edge of town known as the Gadget Graveyard.

Production Company(s): Star Farm Productions
Premieres: October 1. Edgar & Ellen will host the cabler's Scare-A-Thon starting October 29. The Edgar & Ellen short, Trick or Twin will premiere on Halloween night.



PBS

Bob the Builder—Project: Build It

Synopsis: The new series features sequential mini-adventures, aired in succession, that follow along as Bob the Builder and the crew build the town step-by-step; projects include completing the road, constructing the vehicle shelter and building a new workshop for Bob.

Production Company: HIT Entertainment
Premieres: September 2005



It's a Big Big World

Synopsis: The series takes viewers into the World Tree, home to the animals and the show's metaphor for the world as a whole. From a distance, this tree looks just like an enormous tree full of branches and leaves, but when viewed closer, the real complexity of life in the World Tree begins to reveal itself.

Premieres: January 2006
Creator: Mitchell Kriegman

TELETOON, CANADA

Carl²

Synopsis: When Carl, a 14-year-old dude with a 'tude accidentally orders his own clone online, his life is turned upside down.

Production Company: Portfolio Entertainment
Premieres: August 7

Delilah & Julius

Synopsis: This TELETOON original production follows the thrilling adventures of two stylish teen spies as they travel the globe stopping covert plots for world domination and taking down sinister villains.

Production Companies: DECODE Entertainment and Collideascope Animation Studios
Premieres: August 14



Bratz

Synopsis: TELETOON gets a "passion for fashion" this fall with the launch of the new animated series based on the hugely popular collection of dolls.

Production Company: MGA Entertainment
Premieres: September 4

Alien Racers

Synopsis: Based on the popular action figures the series Alien Racers joins KAPOW!, TELETOON'S all-action programming block this fall, with action excitement, strong characters and a fascinating subplot of universe-shaking proportions.

Production Company: MGA Entertainment
Premieres: November 6



Planet Sketch

Synopsis: A TELETOON Original Production, Planet Sketch consists of characters in a rapid-fire high-energy format, which will grab the attention and tickle the funny bone of its young audience.

Production Companies: Aardman Animation and DECODE Entertainment
Premieres: August 29

Gerald McBoing Boing

Synopsis: Gerald McBoing Boing is a TELETOON Original Production and is based on the book by Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr Seuss, about a six-year-old boy who doesn't speak but uses sound to communicate instead.

Production Company: Cookie Jar Entertainment
Premieres: August 29



Sons Of Butcher

Synopsis: Based on the real rock band of the same name, adult show takes a look through the rib-eyes and into the mincemeat minds of three would-be rock gods. When they aren't busy running their "Sons Of Butchers Quality Meats" shop in the armpit of downtown Steeltown, they rock out with their band.

Production Company: S&S Productions Inc.
Premieres: August 5

Station X

Synopsis: This TELETOON Original Production follows the lives of six young artists, musicians, and filmmakers who share a loft in a large dynamic Canadian city. A brilliantly designed blend of original animation and unusual videos and film clips, each episode of Station X explores a theme such as violence, excess and fashion.

Production Company: Cité-Amérique.
Premieres: August 12



The Wrong Coast

Synopsis: This stop-motion series uses the backdrop of an entertainment news magazine to lampoon the entire entertainment genre through sketches ranging from crazy casting choices, awful auditions, alternate careers and movie parodies.

Production Companies: Produced at Cuppa Coffee by Canada's Blueprint Entertainment, in association with Curious Pictures, The Movie Network, Movie Central and TELETOON.
Premieres: August 19



—Compiled by Sarah Gurman

Joe Ranft

1960 - 2005





Andy Knight

Dude, Where's My Space Messenger?

This fall, Disney goes back to the future with the high-energy CG action caper, *Get Ed.* by Ramin Zahed

So you think you've seen all the possible variations of futuristic, cyberteen adventures under the sun. Well, you might see some new and creative takes on *Get Ed.*, the latest addition to the Disney boys' action block known as Jetix. The show's protagonist, Ed, is a genetically altered cybersleuth, who fights identity thieves and other "information-based" crimes in a futuristic world known as Progress City. Of course, like all great crime-fighters, he has a great cover: He and his team of do-gooders work for a high-tech intergalactic messenger service.

Created by Andy Knight, the founder of Toronto's hot animation and vfx studio, Red Rover, *Get Ed* stands out from other similar shows, thanks to its unique CG look and exhilarating action sequences. Knight, who has worked on features such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Pinocchio* and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas*, says the idea for the show evolved from a futuristic short film. "It was a boys' action adventure,

but we wanted to make sure it offered a little twist on the standard formulas," says Knight. "We wanted to incorporate modern filmmaking techniques as well as gaming ideas, so we came up with a one-minute teaser which centered on a kid delivering a parcel at high speed."

Knight and his 70-member team at Red Rover thought it feasible to produce the animated series in-house, and when they got the greenlight from Disney to produce 26 half-hours, it was all systems go. "We use Maya and Autodesk's combustion in production and Digital Fusion in post," he adds. "We now have the resources to do everything in-house and we don't need to rely on overseas to deliver a series."

Knight says when he first set out to create the world of *Get Ed*, he took a look at the boys' action adventure landscape and tried to develop something that his own son, who was six at the time would enjoy. "I think I'm really proud of the sophisticated filmic language we're using. We have the possibility of

using all kinds of camera shots—from dolly shots to first-person-perspective camera p.o.v's, with various depths of field."

Because Red Rover develops its own shorts (such as the critically acclaimed 2003 project, *Plumber*) and also works on commercials, Knight has a clear idea of the hottest trends in the market. "It's ridiculous to give sole emphasis on digital animation," he adds. "Our show is digitally animated because it suits the topic. I wouldn't dream of doing another show in CG. In fact, there's a real boom in traditionally animated work in TV commercials right now. It's shortsighted just to focus on CG animation. We have the ability to do both, so it's all about what's the most effective way to accomplish the production of a project."

Modern technology has also made it possible for Knight to stay in Toronto while producing the show for Disney. For now, he's just waiting to get his hands on more finished episodes of the new show. His eight-year-old son is a huge fan of what he's seen from *Get Ed*, and he's constantly asking Dad for more episodes. "He's worn out the DVD of the pilot," says Knight. "I think he's watched it like 15 times now and has even memorized the theme music!" Nothing like keeping your core audience begging for more! ■

Get Ed premieres Sept. 19 on Toon Disney at 7:30 p.m. and Sept. 24 on ABC Family at 9 a.m.



Joe Ranft

1960-2005

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You touched us all with your big heart, gentle humor and generous spirit;
Your story will always live on...*



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Licensing News

BY RAMIN ZAHED

Crazy Frog Leaps to the U.S.



American consumers were spared the advances of a European phenom known as **The Annoying Thing** for the past couple of years. However, now that **Al Ovadia & Associates** has jumped on board, the popular animated singing ringtone will soon be invading American shores. Also known as **Crazy Frog**, the property's Axel F musical theme sold 600,000 singles in the U.K. earlier this year. Now, the famous amphibian's CD, video single and video games will hit U.S. and Canadian stores in the next few months. "The character has clearly made a connection to consumers of all ages,"

says Ovadia. "With a TV series and feature film in discussion, this frog can truly have legs." He adds that the famous amphibian's merchandise will be geared toward the 6-16 demo and will initially target specialty and gift stores with product expected to be available starting later this year. Mid-tier and mass distribution are planned for 2006. We're sure the frog's animator (Sweden's Erik Wernquist who based it on sounds created by Daniel Malmedahl) are far from annoyed by this great marketing bonanza.

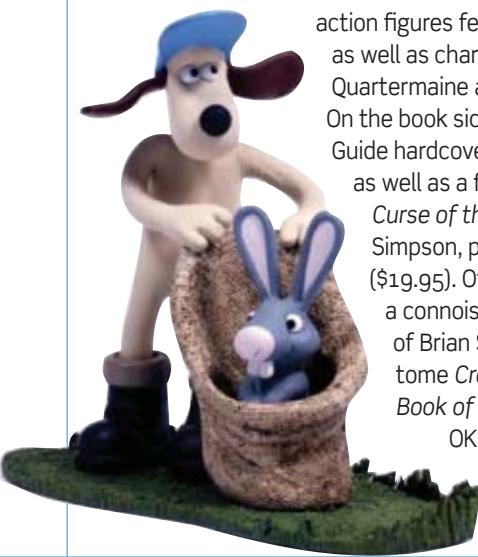
LICENSING

Cracking Collectibles, Gromit!

Ask any animation fan, and they'll tell you that there really is no such thing as overcoverage when it comes to Aardman Animation. So after reading the cover story on the new **Wallace & Gromit** feature, you might be curious about the kind of related collectibles you will find on the market in October. Although DreamWorks has been kind of quiet about all the goods, we know that the folks at **McFarlane Toys**

will release a line of 6" action figures featuring W&G in poses from the picture, as well as characters such as Lady Tottington, Victor Quartermaine and our new favorite, Hutch the rabbit. On the book side, there's a fantastic DK Essential Guide hardcover penned by Glenn Dakin (\$12.99) as well as a fine *The Art of Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* by Andy Lane and Paul Simpson, published by Titan Books in the U.K. (\$19.95). Of course, you can't really call yourself a connoisseur unless you have your own copy of Brian Sibley and Peter Lord's comprehensive tome *Creating 3D Animation: The Aardman Book of Filmmaking* (Harry N. Abrams, \$35).

OK, now you can go back to counting the days until the movie opens in a theater near you!



To the Moon, Jim

Our sources tell us that **Lunar Jim**, the likable star of Alliance Atlantis' new stop-motion series is getting ready to launch his own toy empire. The property recently signed



a worldwide master toy licensing deal with **Fisher-Price**. That means we'll be able to get our hands on some Lunar action figures, vehicles and role play goods beginning in the fall of 2006.

"We're very excited to be working with the most beloved and trusted name in preschool toys," says Jennifer Bennett, VP of merchandising and licensing at Alliance Atlantis. "Fisher-Price has a tremendous legacy of producing fun and compelling toy lines, and I'm delighted that Lunar Jim will be found in toy boxes for years to come!"

Set to premiere on the BBC in the U.K., BBC Kids in Canada, ZDF and KiKa in Germany and Discovery Communications in Latin America, **Lunar Jim** (26x30 or 52x11) follows the adventures of Jim and his friends, Rover the Robot Dog, Ripple the Super Space Mechanic, Eco the Farmer and T.E.D. the Technical Equipment Device in a charming village located on the moon. Something tells us kids are going to get lunatic about these toys in '06. ■

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Sound Solutions

Three audio post houses make major toon noises in L.A.
by Ellen Wolff

Audio post houses specializing in animation play a perennial role in the Los Angeles entertainment industry landscape. A check of the activity levels at three animation audio studios revealed that TV toon producers are keeping these houses humming around the clock.

Hacienda Post

With facilities in Burbank and the Sherman Oaks Galleria, the 16-person Hacienda Post has built a reputation with all the major animation producers. Operations VP Mark Howlett notes that when six-time Emmy Award winner Tim Borquez founded Hacienda in 1999, "He saw a



Mark Howlett (left) and Tim Borquez (right)



niche in animation and went after it."

Today, Hacienda offers full audio post services and has integrated online and offline picture editorial. Among its successes last year, says Howlett, "was winning dual Emmys for the Kids' WB! shows *The Batman* and *Xiaolin Showdown*. They were nominated in the same category, so Hacienda tied with itself."

Hacienda relishes the challenge of starting from scratch with new shows like WB's *Loonatics Unleashed*. "It's going to have a very live-action feel," Howlett explains. "We'll probably create a lot of that. In the past, Foley effects for animation have just been there—you'd just get some footsteps. We've really tried to integrate different levels of Foley, and that creates an added dimension."

A slate of Nickelodeon assignments, including *SpongeBob SquarePants*, has also helped keep Hacienda's docket full. Howlett remarks, "There's a lot of new product coming in the near future, so it's an exciting time. We're always amazed and happy that we actually get paid to do this!"

Two Houses of Style

Each year, the number of houses delivering CG animation for commercials continues to grow. Thanks to affordable software and a community of skilled freelancers, boutique operations are finding niches alongside the bigger players. A look at houses on either end of the spectrum indicates that there are receptive clients for distinct styles of CGI.

Wit Animation

A converted house in the beach community of Venice, Calif. might not be where you'd expect to find production on a major McDonald's commercial. But that's precisely where tiny Wit Animation produces its unique brand of CG character animation. It's also where founder Jeb Milne and his four-person



crew create the original CG shorts that have gotten the studio noticed.

It was actually in-house animation that attracted the attention of Burrell Communications, which awarded Wit the McDonald's spot. And that wasn't the first time that a major player tapped Wit to deliver CGI for a TV ad. Jeb Milne's initial break came when London-based Passion Pictures saw his reel and offered the chance to animate a Beconase spot for McCann-Erickson/UK.

Over the past five years, Wit has completed the CG on commercials for clients here and abroad. Recently, Ames Scullin O'Haire Advertising chose Wit to animate the talking "spokesdog" for Heartguard Plus.

Wit expands to 12 animators when needed, and uses Autodesk's 3ds Max

continued on page 52

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Audio Houses

continued from page 50

Advantage Audio

Burbank-based Advantage Audio boasts a 15-year track record that brings in more than 200 half-hour programs for TV each year. According to founding partner Jim Hodson (himself a seven-time Emmy Award winner) most of the company's 15 employees have been there a dozen years or more. "Familiar faces make demanding jobs a little easier. Anybody can go out and buy a



Pro Tools rig, but it's something else to work efficiently."

Hodson notes that in animation, "which is the majority of our work, there are budget and time demands. But the expectations for great sound have gone up because the technology is there to deliver it. We have two 5.1 mixing stages, all Pro Tools HD, a D5 machine and ADR and Foley Stages. It's a one-stop shop."

Shows posted at Advantage include Disney Channel's *Brandy and Mr. Whiskers* and *Kim Possible*—for which the company recently earned Emmy Awards. They're also handling Nickelodeon's *The Fairly OddParents* and the cabler's upcoming animated series, *The X's*.

Hodson observes that the growing variety of TV animation styles, including CGI, "has opened up a whole new arena for build-

ing more dynamic sound. There's exciting stuff on screen to hang audio on, and that's what we do."

Salami Studios

For the past 12 years, Salami Studios has been honoring an audio tradition by occupying the legendary Devonshire studio complex in North Hollywood. The 12,500-square-foot space where many musical classics were recorded now reverberates with audio for animated TV. Among Salami's current shows, says studio co-founder Gary Falcone, "are *Avatar* for Nickelodeon, *Boondocks* for Sony and *Fire House Tales* for Warner Bros. Animation."

Salami, recalls Falcone, "was one of the first tapeless studios. We started as sound editorial and became a post house eight years ago. Because we're a dubbing stage, we record dialogue as well as Foley. So one part of our business is always running."

With four stages and three edit bays, Salami operates with an average staff of 20, and Falcone says, "They can all multi-task. We do everything on site." Keeping pace with upgrades in Pro Tools is a requirement for success, especially as the quality of TV animation continues to rise.

For example, says Falcone, "We work with Mike Young, most recently on the new *Bratz* series. Most of this work is PAL and headed into high-def. Animation audio just keeps getting better—the tracks just keep expanding. Sometimes on a 22-minute episodic show there are 128 tracks of just sound effects. Today there is no limit." ■

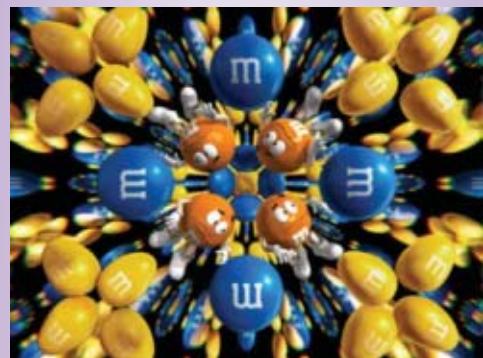
Joe Pizzulo (left) and Gary Falcone (right), the owners of Salami Studios.



and After Effects. While concentrating on character work, Milne observes, "The key is to not go for photorealism, to avoid the 'creepy element' from creeping in. If you create stylized characters, people accept that it is animation. They suspend disbelief and have a good time."

Charlex

This Gotham-based house has a client list that's a "Who's Who" of corporate America, with recent work that includes complex CG in commercials for M&Ms and Visa. According to 3D animation supervisor Anthony Tabtong, "Ninety percent of



the spots are integration, often with live-action back plates."

Charlex's 3D department typically works on a dozen projects simultaneously, sometimes delivering as many as three jobs in a single day. Tabtong's group employs 25 people who are specialists in animation, lighting and other aspects of their Maya/Mental Ray production pipeline. "There's a lot of overlap, which is one of the reasons we turn around so much work."

"We've gotten good at bringing in a client to sit with an animator and an editor and—almost in real time—place a character in a scene. It's almost like an interactive real-time previz."

Given all the contact with advertising agencies and clients, Charlex is in a unique position to evaluate the challenges of providing 3D-CG animation for commercials. "There's a constant need to educate," Tabtong observes. "Some people understand the process, but we run them through sample commercials so they know what to expect. That way, when we show them their spot completely in wire frame they won't flip out!" ■

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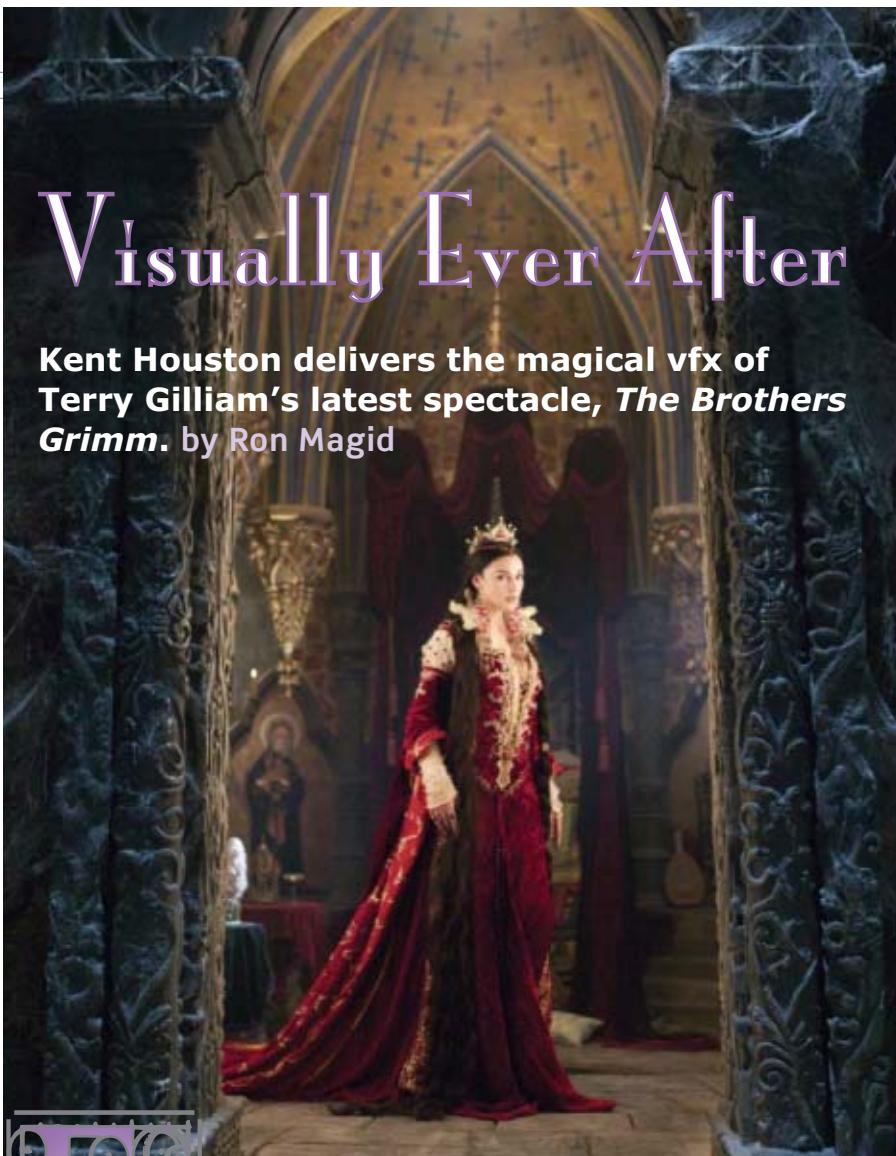
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Visually Ever After

Kent Houston delivers the magical vfx of Terry Gilliam's latest spectacle, *The Brothers Grimm*. by Ron Magid



For decades, visual effects supervisor Kent Houston has supplied much of the magic and mayhem that make Terry Gilliam's delightfully off-kilter films such a feast for the eyes. "We first started working together in 1971 or '72," recalls Houston, whose work with pioneer British animator Bob Godfrey led to his association with Gilliam, creator of the wacky animated paste-ups for *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

"When the Pythons wanted to make their programs for other markets, the BBC wouldn't let them use their materials so they had to recreate them, so Terry needed somebody to shoot his animation for him and that ended up being me. [We bonded because] we were both foreigners in Britain—I'm

from New Zealand and he's originally from Minnesota."

Very few fx artists can say they've enjoyed such a lengthy association with a world-class director—others who come to mind instantly are Dennis Muren and Steven Spielberg, Ken Ralston and Robert Zemeckis—which puts Houston in rare company working with Gilliam on every project. "And every time I do, I wonder why! And he

"I seem to have been able to get onto Terry's [Gilliam] wavelength in terms of the things that he thinks he wants. He often doesn't really know what he wants until he sees it."

—Kent Houston, *The Brothers Grimm's* visual effects supervisor

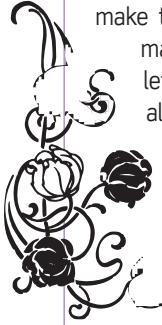
does too," laughs Houston, who formed an intuitive working relationship with the often hard-to-read Gilliam. "I seem to have been able to get onto Terry's wavelength in

terms of the things that he thinks he wants. He often doesn't really know what he wants until he sees it."

Houston's made a career out of helping Gilliam and others—including Julie Taymor (*Titus*) and Martin Campbell (just completing their third collaboration, *The Legend of Zorro*)—get their ideas out of their brains and up on the screen. "Design is everything in these things of Terry's—It's all about the images," he notes. "It's possibly the worst job in the world being Terry's production designer, but Guy Dyas was an absolute master. We'd come up with drawings and ask Terry, 'Is this what you want?' I think his mind is full of a lot of unfinished images, and where we fit in is kind of finishing them off or trying to realize them. It's that thing of working with a visionary. My artists complain, 'He's changed his mind'—I think everything we do evolves."

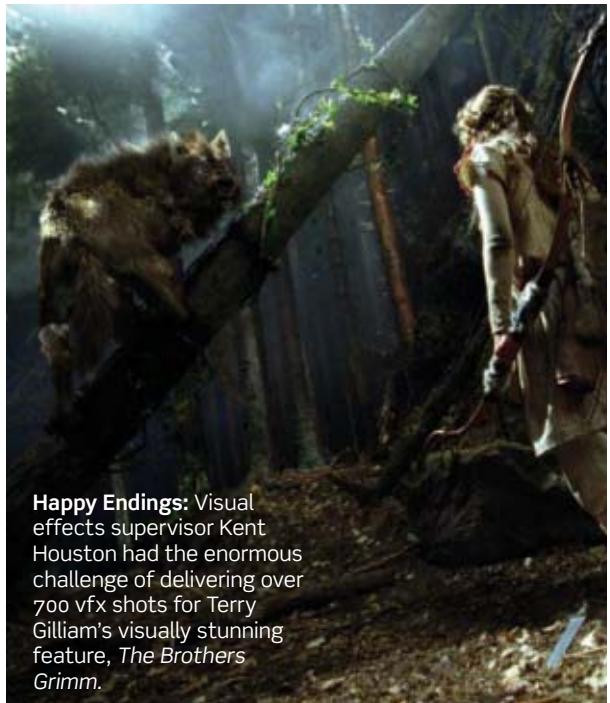
That may explain why Gilliam's movies feel organically right and why they continue to surprise even on repeated viewings. Gilliam's brand of artistic shocks rarely occur when every detail's worked out beforehand. But on *The Brothers Grimm*, another kind of evolution (the wrong kind) was forced on Houston.

The original plan was to use animatronics on set, enhanced with wire and cable removal and augmented throughout with digital effects. "I will always try to do stuff practically where I can," Houston in-





Director Terry Gilliam guides his crew.



Happy Endings: Visual effects supervisor Kent Houston had the enormous challenge of delivering over 700 vfx shots for Terry Gilliam's visually stunning feature, *The Brothers Grimm*.

sists. "A company was engaged to deal with the physical effects and pretty much everything they did failed to come up to Terry's expectations. So we ended up redoing it with CG or miniatures in some cases, which wasn't in our original remit. It became a much more elaborate film, and we had a constant budget squeeze from Miramax."

The Brothers Grimm's original 488 fx shots mushroomed to over 700 shots, handled at London- and L.A.-based vfx outfit, Peerless, which digitally reinvented virtually all of the practical effects.

Typical was the man-wolf in the Red Riding Hood story. "I planned to use the animatronic for closeups, and all the wide shots we'd do CG, which would've been fairly simplistic to deal with," Houston sighs. "We were going to do nine wolf shots, and in the end I think we did 47!"

Unfortunately, when Grimm leapt from

physical effects into CG, Gilliam put the wolf and other characters through yet another design evolution.

"First with the animatronic and then when we went into CG, we went through so many design stages, and Terry just couldn't get it to where he wanted it to be," Houston says. "But we just persisted with playing around with this bit of hair and this bit of backlighting and this bit of puffiness and stuff like that. The wolf has human eyes, and they spent lots of money and time building an animatronic with striking glass eyes that matched those of Tomas Hanak, the actor who morphed into the wolf. It's very hard putting human eyes into a dog's head—there's lots of fiddles you have to do to make them look like human eyes; otherwise they just look like strange dog

eyes that don't work! It was very complex sorting out the inter-ocular spacing and the eyelids structure and reflectivity. It was all hand-animated, including full frame close ups with hair and saliva, tongue and gums, really gnarly stuff, which I didn't really want to get involved in CG-wise."

Another challenge was the Mud Mimic. "It's a blob of mud that leaps out of a well, absorbs a little girl and actually takes on her form," Houston explains. "The mud surface had to be self-replenishing so there are bits falling off





The Mud Mimic sequence
Illustration: Daniel Aske

a flowing surface, but it has her eyes and parts of her face, which was an incredibly complex thing to do in 3D. We took molds of the actress' face, shot lots of photographs and scanned her with the Eyetronics system. The look evolved throughout the process. We had a 2D sketch that Terry had done—but translating something 2D into the 3D world is kind of difficult. We'd make little tweaks and suddenly the nose that he liked in the drawing didn't work in profile. Changing things like that on a complex 3D model with procedural stuff going on was very time consuming. Dominic Parker, a clever guy I worked with at CFC, figured out a way to do this skinning procedurally with Houdini so you could animate the character, then lay this flowing mud over the top of it."

In fact, most of the digital work in Houston's films uses off-the-shelf software—Maya, XSI and Houdini for animation, Mental Ray for rendering all the software packages—a somewhat novel approach. "It's horses for courses really. We try to stay away from

anything custom. I get so tired of people talking about in-house software, and R&D is the last thing I want to do. There was a time where you couldn't buy this stuff and you had to create it, but there are so many great tools around now that it's just stupid...So basically we always look for things that'll do the job we want."

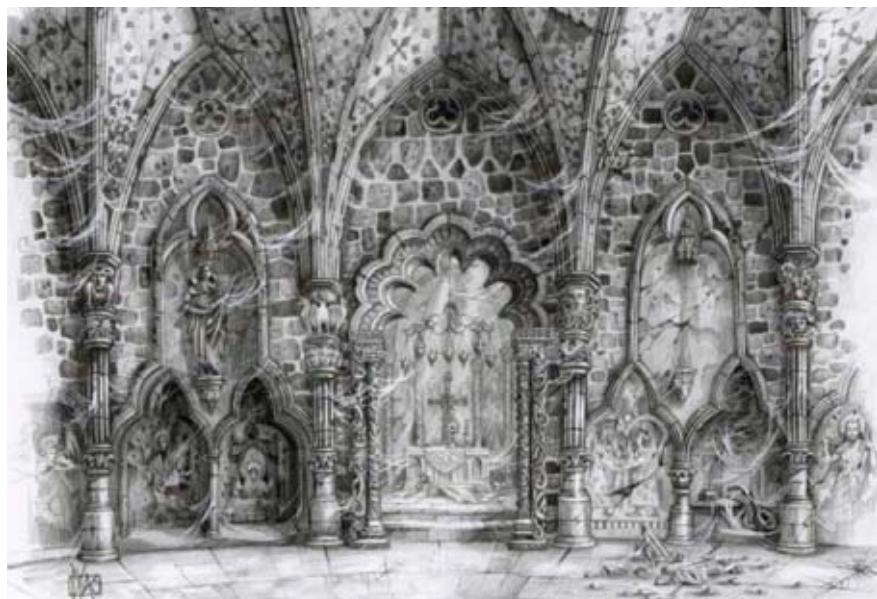
Even if that means shooting miniatures, as Houston did for the core setting of *The Brothers Grimm*—a supernatural forest surrounding a foreboding tower. But when the trees came to life, Peerless animated them digitally. The blend creates a believably Gilliam-esque fantasy realm. "There was some wonderful stuff in *Grimm*, it's just a shame that it was such a miserable process," Houston concludes. "You know, [The Adventures of Baron] Munchausen was tough, but nothing like this! I think Terry likes to stick needles in his eyes for fun—the medieval artist suffering for his art. I'm not like that, I think you should be able to do spectacular things without being made spectacularly miserable. We had incredibly complex work done by a very small group of people in very difficult circumstances, and I want to take my hat off to the Peerless crew. It sort of feels like we were hunched over our desks in our garret in London carving this thing out of grains of rice!" ■

Ron Magid is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects.

Miramax's *The Brothers Grimm* is currently playing in theaters worldwide.



The Mill Witch
Illustration: Daniel Aske





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DIGITAL MAGIC



by Chris Grove

Good (and speedy) vfx things come in consumer-friendly packages.

The other day my 10-year-old nephew sent me a letter with two photographs included in the envelope. One a "Before" version and one an "After." The latter was of his younger brother, Gabe, Photoshopped (and transformed) from an eight-year-old with a polyester cape into a pretty convincing light-saber-wielding Sith Neimoidian (or is it Neimoidian Sith?). Leaving aside the obvious implications for the lifespan of George Lucas's amazing double-trilogy, when pre-teens are becoming hotshot CG manipulators, you know that the salad days of digital technology are actually here. Not only is most of the stuff easier to use than ever, the price of just about anything but the most high-end packages is consumer friendly.

A prime example is the latest generation of Macromedia's Flash Player 8. A living embodiment of the law of unintended consequences, Flash started its life as a web animation tool only to become a favorite weapon of notable TV and feature animators alike. Animators that swear by it love Flash because it uses vector graphics instead of bitmaps or photo images, both of which create large files and are cumbersome design mediums. And with a much smaller file size, it was (and still is) a natural for production companies that use animation houses halfway around the world and need to shuttle material back and forth over the web. The cost savings aren't huge but they're significant. A 22-minute 3D CGI cartoon costs approximately \$400,000 per episode, whereas a Flash episode of the same length costs around \$250,000.

Macromedia has teamed with Gotham-based On2 on the latest iteration of Flash to take advantage of On2's VP6 compression technology. Unless you're working in HD video from start to finish, compression is always an issue. Following the physics of the law of conservation as it must, with compression technology, if you squeeze more data into an ever-smaller space something's got to give. In this case, picture quality.

So the Holy Grail of the algorithm crowd has always been to make compressed images look almost as good

as those uncompressed. Enter On2. "The most advanced [software] codecs today have very sophisticated processing," says On2 president and CEO Doug McIntyre. "The problem of artifacts [random, distorted pixel clusters that appear as shapes or fuzzy edges] has been largely solved." With 600 million downloads of Flash and counting, the new alliance will make just about every PC and Mac user's online video look better than ever, even at dial-up speed [56K modem]. And in what McIntyre calls

HQ in Belgium, Eyetronics delivers high-res scanning services and animation-ready 3D models for feature films, television, commercials and computer games. Producers of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Batman Begins* and *Land of the Dead* used the company's services.

Eyetronics says that its systems can produce a full body scan in 90 seconds. That's a process that, until recently, could take from 20 to 30 minutes. The accelerated scan time is especially appealing to producers of films with large casts of characters. Scan data from Eyetronics' portable equipment is processed in the company's proprietary software and exported as fast and accurate 3D models with HD-equivalents of texture and color data, ready for immediate integration in production pipelines.

To create the multitudes of singing and dancing Oompa Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, for example, Eyetronics produced facial capture scans of actor and prototype Oompa Loompa Deep Roy over several performances, each with subtle differences. Then London-based visual effects facility The Moving Picture Company scaled and composited the replicated Roys into a cohesive and choreographed troupe. For *Batman Begins*, body scans of Christian Bale were used to create his Batman costumes and Bale's digital double. To populate scenes in George Romero's *Land of the Dead*, meanwhile, legions of Romero's signature horrific creatures were created using scans of a dummy zombie that were then animated and composited. "It was a true time saver," says Jeff Campbell, Dead's visual fx supervisor. "[Eyetronics] process eliminates guesswork and gets us to animation faster."

And if you're a 10-year old Photoshop maven with a long list of things to do before you sleep, speed is everything. ■

Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist specializing in visual effects. If you have any tips or suggestions for his monthly Digital Magic column, you can email him at edit@animationmagazine.net.

Send in the clones: Eyetronics' systems were used to create the singing and dancing Oompa Loompa sequence in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

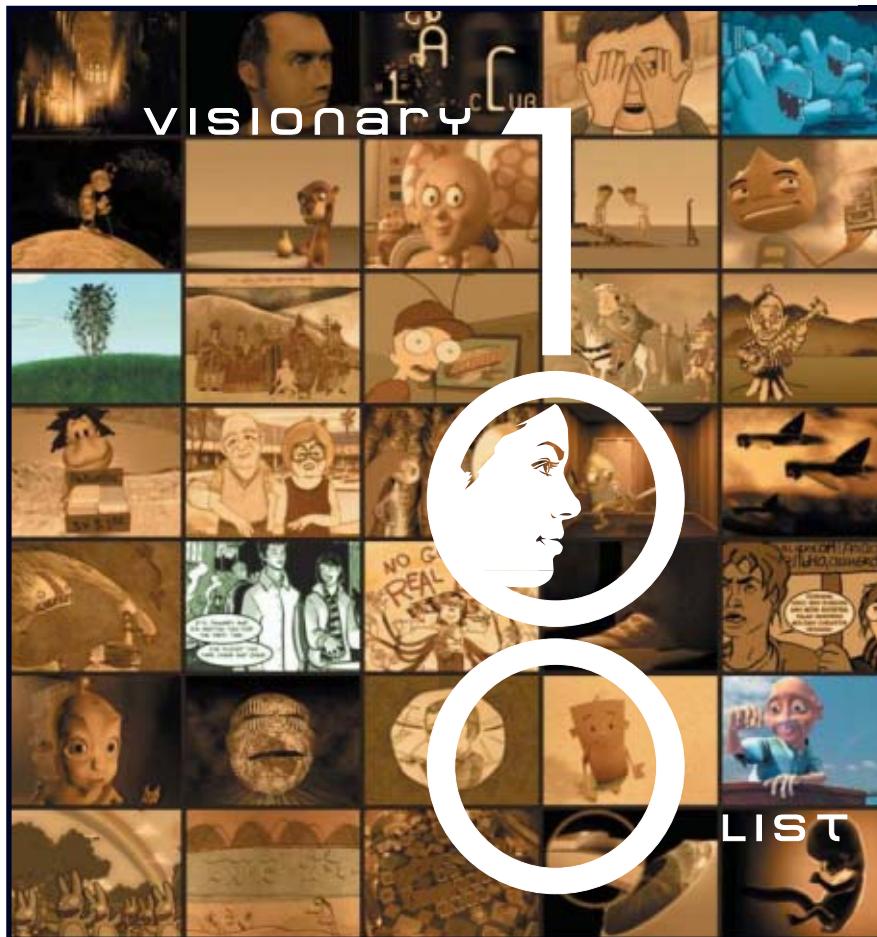


On2 joins forces with Flash

a "watershed moment for the worldwide community of Flash developers and digital media designers," the Flash Player 8 contains Flix Pro and Flix Engine, respectively, an out-of-the-box encoder and a tool kit for people who want to build 8's encoding into other applications. "People love to use Flash because it doesn't have all that territorial stuff," says McIntyre. "It looks playerless and it has none of the baggage of the [other on-line video players]."

Speaking of keeping it simple, could mo-cap get any bigger? Once thought of as a poor man's animation tool, it's now a big part of the elite as claymation. Robert Zemeckis used it heavily for *The Polar Express* and will use it for his next animated film, *Monster House*. And two of this summer's few blockbusters (and one moderate hit) used another version of mo-cap with the aid of Los Angeles-based Eyetronics' new technology for high-res scans of characters and facial performances. With its European





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Tech Review Corner

by Chris Tome

Wacom's Cintiq 21UX

If you're as old school as I am, you may remember working years ago on a couple of drawing tablets from companies such as Calcomp and SummaSketch. Fast forward 20 years, and there's really only one 800-pound gorilla left, and that's Wacom. With its batteryless, cordless pens, excellent pressure sensitivity and more, Wacom basically wiped out the competition and created a line of tablets that are in use by artists worldwide. A few years ago, Wacom revealed the first tablets in its Cintiq line, a new LCD based pressure sensitive drawing system. Combining a display and its pressure-sen-



sitive tablet technology, the Cintiq was a fantastic idea on paper, but the first efforts fell far short of success, both in price and technology. The units were prohibitively expensive, the resolution of the displays was far below what most digital artists were used to at the time and they were clunky and heavy. That didn't mean though, that artists didn't lust after them despite their shortcomings.

All that has recently changed, however, with the introduction of the Wacom Cintiq 21UX. At 21.3" and UXGA (1600 x 1200) resolution, the new Cintiq is finally ready for prime time. And the price of \$2,495 makes it a tempting toy for even the most frugal CG artist. Yes, the tablet itself has been slimmed down, and even though it's still a bit heavy, it fits on your lap or a desk much easier than previous models, and it feels better generally to work with. The Intuos style pen is batteryless and cordless, and has 512 levels of pressure sensitivity, roughly half that of standard Wacom tablets. I found the difference in pressure sensitivity to be negligible at best, and the bonus of being able to draw directly on screen more than makes up for any lack of sensitivity.

Is the Cintiq for every artist? In many ways I would say yes, but if you spend the majority of your

days deep in Maya or XSI, the Cintiq probably won't be for you. But I know very few artists who don't religiously dive into PhotoShop or Painter from time to time (or all the time), and any 2D software can benefit from the intuitive control the Cintiq gives you in the digital world. Also, if you are into 2D animation programs, storyboarding, concept drawing, or matte painting, chances are you'll fall so hard for a Cintiq you'll mortgage your grandma to get one.

As Wacom improves its technology and lowers prices, I expect to see many more Cintiqs out and about. At Pixar, for example, these devices have really been put into great use, and everyone from storyboard artists to even director Brad Bird uses them daily. It's great to see awesome technology get better and even more affordable, and in 10 years or so there may be no such thing as a drawing tablet without an embedded screen. The future of this technology is exciting indeed, and I'm glad to see Wacom continue to innovate with artistic tools that totally kick ass.

Website: www.wacom.com/lcdtablets

Price: \$2,495 (web sale price)

cles, fur, hair and shading nodes, and does so easily inside of Maya, making the learning curve much less steep. Speed, reliability and its' renowned effects like motion blur are all there, and production quality, time and project tested advantages of the regular RenderMan are included.

Although the field of available renderers for 3D artists is wide, most do not dispute the strength of RenderMan, and for anyone looking to get into a larger production environment, it would be wise to use RenderMan, if only to have knowledge of how it integrates into a typical CG workflow. While shading specialists and TDs may have to know more about using RIB files and be able to get "under the hood" of RenderMan, RM for Maya is much easier to use, while still being a very powerful and fast rendering engine.

RenderMan for Maya also supports popular features like global illumination and subsurface scattering, which is a must for any present day rendering technology. If any user wants to move into getting RIB files in or out, writing procedural plugins or using the SLIM programmable shading tools, making the move to RAT would be much more easily done with exposure to RM for Maya.

Support for other 3D software is currently being evaluated, but Pixar believes that by going with Alias Maya first, they will have the largest potential to open new markets for RenderMan and expose 3D professionals to the benefits of RenderMan without the typically high learning

curve their other products require.

RenderMan for Maya will be available sometime in the third quarter of 2005 and can be downloaded from the Pixar website. It will require a credit card in order for you



to download the software, but you will receive a full-blown 30-day trial version, and your card won't be billed until after that period. This is a great way to evaluate the software and see if it's right for you. Not that you wouldn't take almost the entire visual effects industry at their word though now, would you?

Website: <https://renderman.pixar.com>

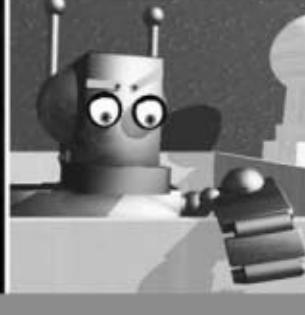
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State of the Art

Holy Digital City, Batman!

Paul Franklin reveals the secrets of creating a virtual city for *Batman Begins*. by Barbara Robertson

This month's question comes from Industrial Light & Magic's David Meny who asks: *I thought the fx work in Batman Begins was amazing. What stood out for me were the digital extensions of the city and the elevated subways. What were the challenges in creating the virtual cityscapes? How were they created?*

None of it is real, of course; it couldn't be. But, as film critic Roger Ebert put it, director Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* acts as if it is. Batman himself seems real, and Bruce Wayne's gritty Gotham City is as tangible as, oh, say, Chicago.

Although one city block of downtown Gotham lived inside a converted aircraft hangar, much of the Warner Bros. film was shot on the streets of the big-shouldered Windy City. London's Double Negative matched those shots with digital architecture and turned piddly little Chicago into Bruce Wayne's hometown.

When we see the sun rise over Gotham City from Bruce Wayne's plane as he returns home, the camera sweeps across half a million buildings that span 40 virtual miles. It's a 100% digital shot; all the buildings are fully 3D. But, even though all the buildings in the big aerial sunrise shot are digital, each one is based on a real building. That's true throughout the film.

"Except for Wayne Tower, every building is a faithful reproduction of a real building in Chicago," says Paul Franklin, visual effects supervisor. "Wayne Tower is imaginary, but all of its components were taken from observed reality. We didn't invent buildings."

"Christopher [Nolan] wasn't into fantasy architecture," Paul adds. "He wanted to ground the film in an objective reality so audiences would believe that Batman could be a real character. Batman's not possessed of superhuman strength; he's a regular guy

'By using multiple views of the same building, the software [dnPhotofit] found correspondence points between architectural features and that provided enough information to extract geometry.'

—*Batman Begins*' visual effects supervisor, Paul Franklin

with access to high tech gadgets who has trained himself to do the things he does."

It was a huge undertaking; one that caused the studio to write several new software tools. "We knew we couldn't fit the show into our existing pipeline," Paul says. "Our R&D team went into overdrive right at the beginning of the project in November 2003."

For the big aerial shot, a new custom photo-

metry tool, dnPhotofit, helped the crew build thousands of skyscrapers from thousands of photographs. "By using multiple views of the same building, the software found correspondence points between architectural features and that provided enough information to extract geometry," Paul says, noting that the software evolved from ideas developed by Paul Debevec at UC Berkeley in the 1990s. "You end up with polygonal geometry and project the photographs back onto it."

And that gives you a 3D photorealistic building—or 3,000 buildings if you're constructing Gotham City. Close-up shots required more detailed work.

"We acquired a low resolution reference model of some areas, which we rebuilt, and we constructed other areas working from maps, from walking around the streets and from surveying buildings to create a footprint for the Loop area inside the loop of the El train," says Paul, referring to Chicago's elevated train. Most of the film's action takes place in that area. "We didn't construct all 2,000 buildings

in the loop in high res, only 50 buildings." An additional 3,000 built with low polygon levels filled the area inside and extended into the area outside the Loop.

For the close-up buildings, the team documented three key areas in high detail using Lidar scans and digital stills: the big Franklin Orleans drawbridge on Wacker Drive that crosses the Chicago River from

the Loop, which became "the narrows" in the film; an area around a parking garage just south of the bridge, where the Batmobile turned rooftops into a race track; and the Riverside Plaza building, which served as the basis for Wayne Tower

As the crew built the skyscrapers, dnAsset, a new asset management tool, put them into an online database that was dynamically updated and

linked to scene files. New layout tools helped the artists design and manage the city.

It was a good thing: The final camera move for the big aerial shot, for example, wasn't locked down until two months before deadline. "We offered up different layouts and approaches to the city regularly from October until February," says Paul. "If we had known what Chris was going to do right from the beginning, it might have been more efficient to do a matte painting, but 3D was more flexible."

Double Negative's proprietary STIG software stitched digital stills taken on location into panoramas that were used for texture maps. "STIG is similar to off-the-shelf panorama tools like Realviz Stitcher," Paul says, "but it's resolution independent and it supports HDRI and Open EXR." (Open EXR is an open source file format, originally developed by Industrial Light & Magic, that supports HDRI, an acronym for high dynamic range images.)

At first, Nolan was concerned about Double Negative shooting photos for texture maps with digital cameras, but demos of HDRI images side-by-side with projected film convinced him. Each tile (still) in the panorama was bracketed across ten stops (exposure settings) to produce the high-dynamic range images. "We had the process down," Paul says. "We could take high resolution 360-degree panoramas in an hour."

For efficiency, rather than baking out a huge, 50,000 pixel, tiled and stitched panorama of Gotham City, STIG created an instruction set so that only the part of the panorama seen by the camera

CPUs, which Paul says wasn't even a stretch.

The elevated monorail was also rendered in levels of detail. "It was very complex," says Paul, "with lots of detail on the outside and a fully detailed, fully illuminated interior including seats and flickering lights." Two carriages out of five were real—those used for closeups of actors, but the cityscape outside was digital. A miniature train crashed through the car park, but during the fight sequence, the train and cityscape were both 100% digital.

For reference, the crew visited the Chicago Transit Authority's train yards. "We could see the electricity arcing and the light glinting off the carriages, which was very helpful," Paul says. Although they based Gotham's train exterior on Chicago's it was bronze rather than polished stainless steel. "In the bright sunlight of Chicago, theirs gleams like a moving trophy through the city," Paul says. "Ours

A sophisticated lighting system combined with custom RenderMan shaders added ambient light and reflections that matched reference footage from location shots, even duplicating the type of lighting fixtures and the glazing on the glass used in the virtual buildings to those in real Chicago buildings. For reflection maps, the crew used HDRI renders of each building's façade projected onto 2D cards and placed into the building's position in the 3D environment.

"We had live action shots cut back to back with our city, so we kept looking at the reference to be sure we had the right distribution of color temperature and color patterns," says Paul. "It was pretty intense."

The style reflected Nolan's intent for the film. "Chris didn't want the film to be an over-the-top comic book," Paul says. "He wanted the comic



City of Quartz: The visual effects team relied on a sophisticated lighting system paired with custom RenderMan shaders to create ambient lights and reflection shots for the digital version of Chicago.



was handed to RenderMan or Shake. (In addition to Pixar's RenderMan for rendering and Apple's Shake for compositing, Double Negative uses Alias Maya for 3D models and animation.)

"The upshot was that in addition to having levels of detail in the geometry, we had levels of detail for the texture maps," says Paul. "Stig would automatically down res to whatever was necessary." And that allowed the studio to render Gotham on 400

is dirty and battered. It reflects Gotham fallen into dilapidation."

Wayne Station, based on the Sydney Opera House, was rendered in steel, bronze and glass rather than concrete. The tower system that suspends the metal train 150 feet in the air was designed after girders in the building used for the Gotham set—an 80-year-old zeppelin hangar in Cardington, Bedfordshire.

rendered into reality. He was nervous about what might happen if the CGI guys were left to run away with things." By the end of post, though, Nolan was confident enough of the CG work to add shots that Double Negative created from scratch.

In the final scene, Batman flies down a building and out of frame with the cityscape behind him. "When Chris asked us to make the final shot fully digital, we were reasonably sure we wouldn't get fired," Paul laughs.

Paul's question sends us back to ILM: How did they create the amazing death-ray disintegration effects in War of the Worlds? ■

Barbara Robertson is an entertainment journalist who specializes in computer graphics, animation and visual effects. If you have a State of the Art question, e-mail her at brobertson@animationmagazine.net.



Illustration by Mike Yamada

A Skillful Art Project

Pasadena's Art Center launches a successful design and publishing course. **by Ellen Wolff**

OPPORTUNITIES

Imagine an opportunity where art school undergrads get to author a book of their concept designs. Sounds too good to be true, but that's exactly what happened to three graduates of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California.

Khang Le, Mike Yamada and Felix Yoon were nearing the end of their coursework when teacher Scott Robertson presented them with a unique challenge. He would oversee an independent study course in

which the trio would create concept art for a hypothetical film based on a short story of their choosing. Their work would become the basis for a book that would be published by Robertson's publishing company, Design Studio Press (www.designstudiopress.com).

"It's a common practice at Art Center to do independent study projects with students at advanced levels," says Robertson. "I thought there was a great opportunity to show what goes on here. The book would

be designed to share the creative process and show that early in the visual development process there are multiple directions in which you can go."

To select an appropriate story, the students scoured the Internet, searching for material in the public domain. That way they could reprint the story for people to read before they saw the concept art. A Brothers Grimm tale titled *The Skillful Huntsman* was chosen because of its design flexibility. "It was a very classic story with a princess, a hero, a king and giants," explains Robertson. "And it offered the freedom to explore multiple environments. There were a couple of 'design loopholes,' sentences like, 'He traveled for many years. That was perfect for us. It was almost like designing for a flashback. You can put an entire movie's worth of effort into a 30-second flashback if you have to design all vehicles, props and people."

Throughout the 14-week course, the students met weekly and shared 10 or 15 pages of designs. Le, whose spectacular environmental painting graces the book's cover, notes that "every week we did what was equivalent to two to three pages of the book."

They weren't forced to work sequentially on the story, although the book's final layout takes readers methodically through the design process and includes multiple ideas from each student, Robertson observes, "You can see that their work moves within different time periods and different technological levels. Some designs were very medieval, while others were sci-fi. There's a diversity of ideas. This isn't the finished movie book where we only see final designs. This is what happens *before* a director comes in and picks the design."

The students typically created their early thumbnail sketches with pen and ink, and then scanned those sketches into their computers for further development using Adobe Photoshop.

Each one of the trio's distinctive styles were evident even in their earliest sketches—in Le's abstract environments, Yamada's Japanese brush-stroke silhouettes and Yoon's expressive costume ideas. As Robertson sees it, "Because this work



Felix Yoon



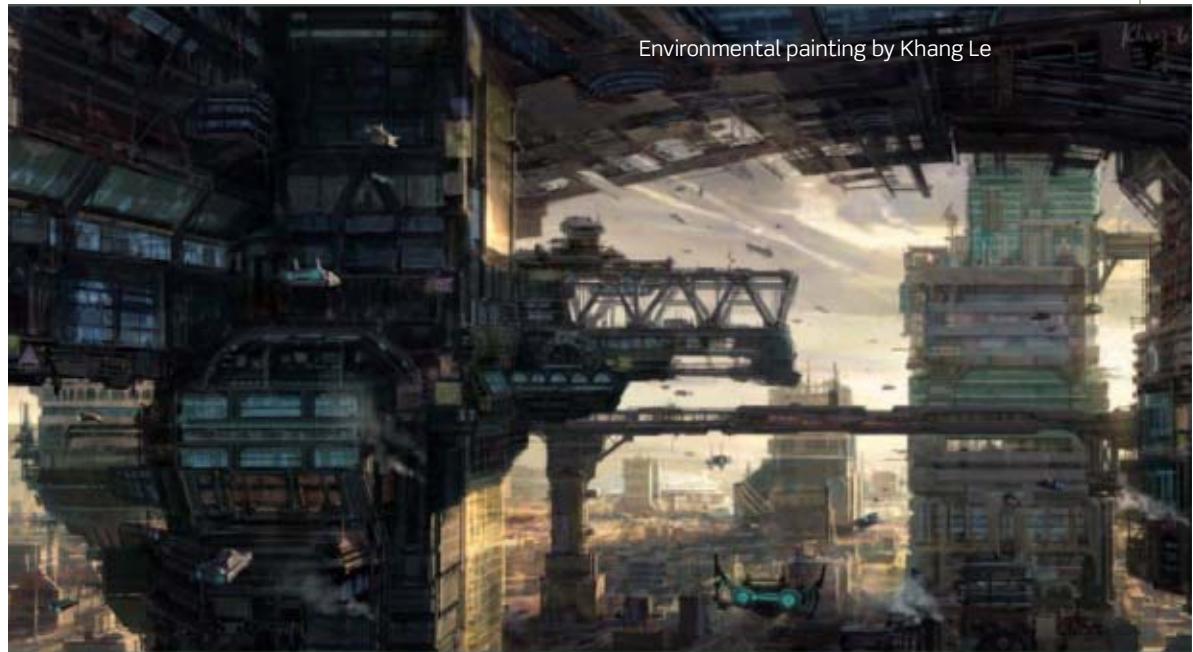
Khang Le



Mike Yamada



Scott Robertson



Environmental painting by Khang Le

would go into a film book without the film, they could experiment freely. There was nobody to answer to."

That situation has certainly changed for the three artists today. With *The Skillful Huntsman* artwork in their portfolios, all three received multiple job offers upon graduation. Felix Yoon is now at DreamWorks Animation, creating concept art for the upcoming CG feature, *Over the Hedge*. After a stint at DreamWorks working on Aardman's *Flushed Away*, Mike Yamada recently joined director James Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment. And Khang Le is at NCsoft, creating environments for massively multi-player games. All three consider *The Skillful Huntsman* project a turning point.

As Mike Yamada explains, "My major at Art Center had been product design. Then this book came along and it gave me direction." Felix Yoon also refocused his career goals as a result of this experience. "I didn't really know about entertainment design until the year before I graduated." After working on *The Skillful Huntsman*, he says, he knew entertainment design was something he'd have to do.

The project has had an impact on Scott Robertson's approach to teaching as well. He created the curriculum for the Entertainment Design Program that Art Center is launching this fall. The dedicated

eight-term program, which, Robertson directs, will focus on developing students abilities to design environments, characters, vehicles and props in past, present and future scenarios. "Proportionally, they will probably spend 40% of their time on environments and characters and about 20% of their time on vehicles and props because that's the split that people need for production," he notes.

The Skillful Huntsman is just the first of the student books that Robertson hopes to publish—with artists sharing any profits. "We will take different approaches each time. It might be video game development or matte painting, but it will always have a story element," he says. He believes the challenge of creating art for a book helps prepare students for the

"This isn't the finished movie book where we only see final designs. This is what happens before a director comes in and picks the design."

—Scott Robertson, Design Studio Press founder

pressures of professional life. "It's very difficult, a year away from graduation, to make the connection that what they're doing will go into their portfolio and could influence the start of their careers. But when they know that their designs will appear in print, the level of the work really goes up." Now that certainly sounds like a fairy tale ending for everyone involved in the Grimm project. ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who focuses on visual effects, CG animation and education.



Class Acts 2005

Animation Magazine's

Third Annual Student Short Film Awards

You crazy kids keep surprising us every year. After all the cool shorts we screened at SIGGRAPH this year, we sat down to choose our own picks for the magazine's Student Short Film Awards. It certainly wasn't an easy task to pick 11 qualifying titles (one big winner and ten for our winners circle) from the hundreds of inspired toons you sent us.

Truth be told, this is one of our favorite annual activities, because we are always pleasantly surprised by the caliber of talent and imagination out there in academia. Once again, we'd like to thank all of your brilliant students who entered our competition this year. In our eyes, you are all winners. We know we're going to be writing about your brilliant careers in the years ahead! And now, the drum roll, please!

First Prize: Food for Thought by

Ian Yonika (Ringling School of Art & Design). It's hard to put our finger on why we got such a big kick of this clever CG-animated tale (which was created using Maya 6.01, Shake 2.4, BodyPaint3D and PhotoShop). The two-minute short centers on a big monster called Mugtor and a little imp called Nishu who team up to get their paws on some hard-to-reach branches on a fruit tree. Maybe it's Yonika's simple design or the perfect music by Ben Garceau or the big laughs the final punchline generates. All we know is that we loved it when the greedy jerk Nishu gets his comeuppance in the end. Somebody please give Yonika a studio film deal, pronto!



The Winners Circle

Things That Go Bump in the Night by **Joshua Beveridge** (Ringling School of Art & Design). This one has been getting a lot of attention at festivals everywhere (including SIGGRAPH), and it's easy to see why. Beveridge's beautifully rendered CG short (Maya, Shake, PhotoShop, Premiere) displays a wicked sense of humor and should resonate with anyone who's afraid to find out what really makes those disturbing noises in the middle of the night.

Binge and Purge/Animals in Love by **Ben Meinhardt** (Vancouver Film School). Ben's colorful interrelated shorts visits a strange world where anime's cute and happy animals meet the dark post-apocalyptic universe of *Mad Max*. Although the Flash animation pays homage to the best imports from Japan, the heart and soul of the short is closer to the world of *Happy Tree Friends*.

Evolution by **Alex Campos** (Woodbury University). Fans of old Looney Tunes classics and Tex Avery shorts will love Campos' old-fashioned pen-

and-ink drawings. This delightful effort will have Darwinists laughing all the way to the nearest zoo.

Channel 8 News by **Benjamin Hendricks** (University of Southern California). Anyone who has ever been subjected to the superficial, moronic content of the nightly local news will be able to appreciate this witty spoof by Hendricks. It takes this brilliant animator only 80 seconds to deliver the goods, something that the so-called pros on *Saturday Night Live* can only dream of doing!

continued on page 68



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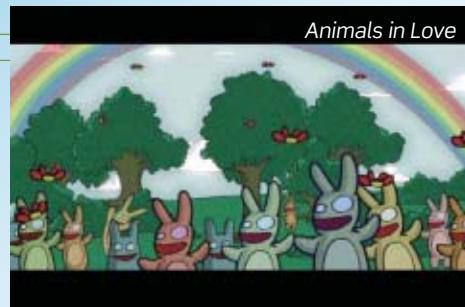
continued from page 66

Glass Sword by Irvan Hanafi (Vancouver Film School). The more we watched this beautifully 2D animated short by Hanafi, the more we appreciated its clever “Ha-Ha” finale. Inspired by the best manga traditions, the animator tricks you into believing that his short is just another anime sci-fi redux. And then, bam, he delivers a delicious twist worthy of O’Henry.

Reunited by Zoya Baker (NYU Tisch School’s Animation Dept.). We confess: Baker’s traditionally animated tale is definitely sentimental, but it truly touched us. The four-minute-long project, which served as the filmmaker’s senior thesis project, centers on the ghost of a dead son who visits his parents long after his accidental death. There’s something very appealing about the gentle storyline, the childlike simplicity of the drawings and the delicate tone of the narrative.

Innocence by Scott Spencer and Bennett Cain (Savannah College of Art and Design). Dolls and crazy Starship Troopers-like aliens wreak havoc in a strange new stop-motion universe. We can’t tell you much about the storyline, but there was something really creepy and ethereal about this short that got under our skin. We have a feeling Spencer and Cain are destined to have a big future in the sci-fi world.

Small and Deep Love Stories by Hsin-Ping Pan (University of Southern California). We were dying to know what Pan



Animals in Love



Evolution

was thinking when she made this amazing menagerie of four brief sketches about—what else?—romance or something like it. In colorful 2D landscapes that remind us of the work of French artist Folon, she delivers her unique take on *amour fou*. As she explains, “My original idea was to describe the love and passion between couples in the manner of a visual poem. So I developed short stories and different characters to capture some magical moments and feelings that I have felt.” The Taiwanese-born artist certainly makes us feel them too.

The Potter by Josh Burton (Savannah College of Arts and Design). Next time someone whines that CG animated characters are somewhat less emotionally involving than 2D toons, send them a copy of Burton’s magical (and clocking in a 7.5 minutes, quite lengthy!) short. Check out the lifelike expressions on the ancient potter character who is trying to teach his apprentice the secrets of his enigmatic trade. The potter certainly would have approved of Burton’s own exquisite craftsmanship.

Cub Scouts Pack 213 by Sterling Sheehy (USC). OK, we were definitely on the fence about the slightly homophobic tone of this very funny 2D toon about a “scout-like” troop of kids being taught all kinds of metrosexual skills by their clueless, nature-phobic leader. But the laughs finally won us over. And how can you fault a creator who comes up with an absurd line like, “We spell scouts S-C-O-U-T-S which makes us a completely different autonomous organization.” Who knew Ryan Seacrest would become such a role model? ■



Channel 8 News



Glass Sword



Reunited



Innocence



Small and Deep Love Stories



Cub Scout/Pack 213



The Potter



"Where else can I see
my vision
come to life
just as I imagined?"



Frame from animated short "No Class"
by Andy Mastrocine, NYU-SCPS student

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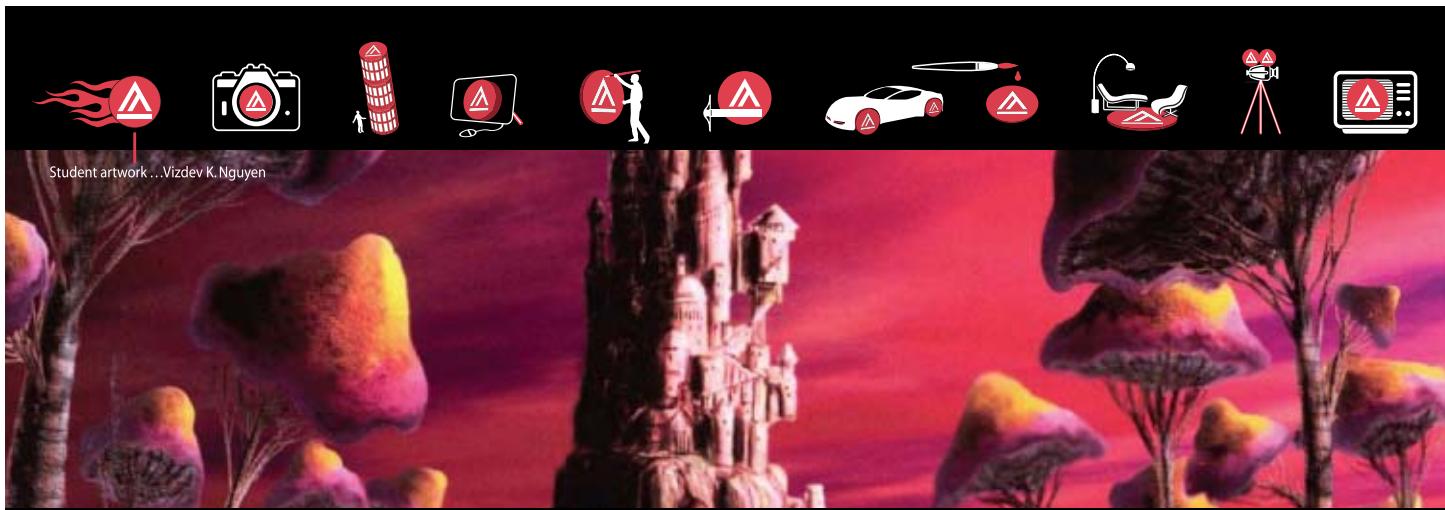
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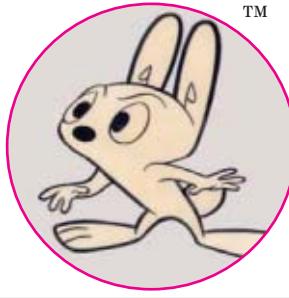
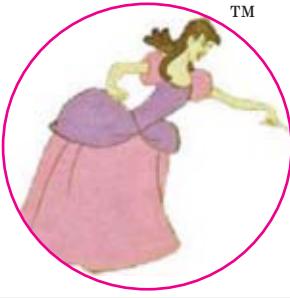
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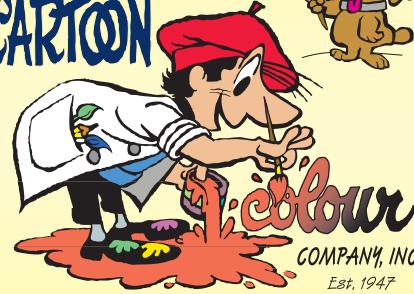
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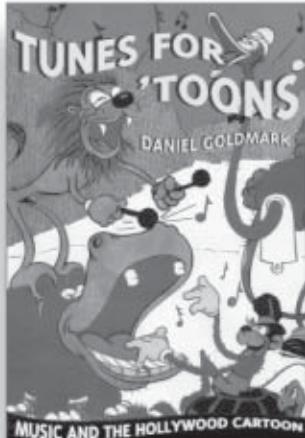
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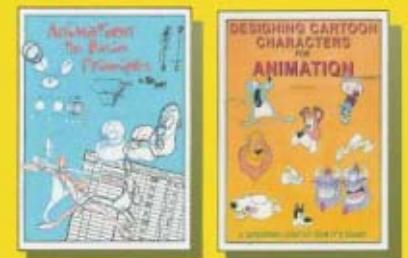
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Event	Date	Place	Website
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Chicago Int'l Toy and Game Fair (CHITAG)	Sept. 2-4	Chicago, IL	www.chitag.com
Anime Festival	Sept. 2-5	Dallas, TX	www.animefest.org
Big Apple Anime Fest	Sept. 2-5	New York, NY	www.bigappleanimefest.com
Telluride Film Festival	Sept. 2-5	Telluride, CO	www.telluridefilmfestival.com
Fantoche	Sept. 6-11	Baden, Switzerland	www.fantoché.ch
Toy and Game Inventors Forum	Sept. 8-10	Orlando, FL	www.tgiforme.com
IBC	Sept. 8-13	Amsterdam, Netherlands	www.ibc.org.uk/ibc
Toronto Int'l Film Festival	Sept. 8-17	Toronto, Canada	www.e.bell.ca/filmfest/2005/home.asp
Gulf Coast Film & Video Festival	Sept. 16-18	Houston, TX.	http://gulfcoastfilmfest.com
Antimatter Festival of Underground Short Films	Sept. 16-24	Victoria, BC, Canada	www.antimatter.ws
Atlantic Film Festival	Sept. 17-25	Halifax, Nova Scotia	www.atlanticfilm.com
Montreal FilmFest	Sept. 18-25	Montreal, Canada	www.montrealfilmfest.com
Palm Springs International Festival of Short Films	Sept. 20-26	Palm Springs, FL	www.psfilmfest.org
Cartoon Forum 2005	Sept. 21-25	Santiago de Compostela, Spain	www.cartoon-media.be
Ottawa Int'l Animation Festival - OIAF	Sept. 21-25	Ottawa, Canada	www.awn.com/ottawa
Mobile Entertainment Summit	Sept. 26	San Francisco	www.ihollywoodforum.com/MESFALL2005.htm
Chiavari International Animation	Sept. 27-Oct. 1	Chiavari, Italy	www.chiarifilmfestival.com
Wizard World Boston	Sept. 30-Oct. 2	Boston, MA	www.wizarduniverse.com



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A Day in the Life

PARTING SHOT

We pay a visit to Toronto-based animation house Cuppa Coffee this month to see how company founder Adam Shaheen and his team are faring with their new monkey sensation, *Bruno*.



9 a.m. Every morning, exec producer Adam Shaheen helps Bruno check his e-mail. Oh look, here's one from Koko the Sign-Language Gorilla! It says, "Pretty flower puppy hungry."



10 a.m. Bruno spends some time admiring the Cuppa Coffee trophy case. We don't have the heart to tell him they're not his.



10:30 a.m. Bruce Willis stops by to pitch Adam and Bruno on a sequel to *12 Monkeys*. (Bruno thought he'd be taller.)



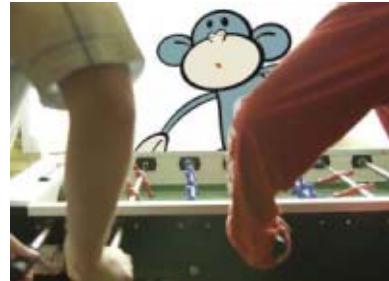
11 a.m. Director of photography Drew Fortier tries to coax Bruno from the lighting grid again. Little does Drew know that DP also stands for director of primates.



12 noon Bruno finally accepts Drew's bribe and heads to the lunchroom to scarf down bananas. Brendan considers moving to another table but doesn't want to be rude.



1 p.m. Bruno visits the wardrobe department to play dress-up, err, I mean do some "in-character" research.



2 p.m. Bruno is the Office Foosball Champion. (Of course, he does have the unfair advantage of having opposable digits on all four limbs.)



3 p.m. Bruno helps redecorate the office with his best friends Bailey the dog and master multi-tasker Andy Nunnari.



4 p.m. Bruno visits his good friend Mike Rowland of Wanted Studios, breaking Mike's "No monkeys in the booth" policy.



5 p.m. After all that hard work, Bruno figures he'll call it a day. That's writer Brendan Russell in the background taking notes for the upcoming "Bruno takes a nap" episode.



1:30 p.m. All that magic training pays off. Watch him make receptionist Eileen Jang's quarter disappear!

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